

# BOOK OF TOMORROW

## VOLUME 6



An Earthdawn Publishing Trust Fanzine

# BOOK OF TOMORROW

*These are the Books of Harrow.*

*They are our doom and our salvation.*

*Learn from them, or we will all perish.*

*—Eliana Messias, The Martyr Scholar*

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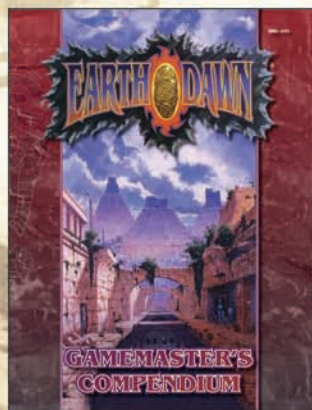
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# GIVE THEM PERSONALITY

Add Color to the Earthdawn Spirit World

by Oren Shochat

On the balcony of his bizarre villa, Eleszar was sipping slowly from a tall glass and enjoying the sunset-painted, red sky. Suddenly, the balcony double doors whammed open, hitting the wall.

"What did I tell you about disturbing me at my evening ritual, Tomas?" Eleszar said.

"Ritual? You're drinking hot chocolate!" Tomas said.

"See, you've made me spill it. If you weren't my nephew..."

"Your favorite nephew."

Eleszar sighed and swiveled his chair. The athletic youth wore a soft esparaga-leather outfit tailored by the finest needlework in Throal. It sat on his body like he was born with it. From his shining black boots to his golden-trimmed cap, Tomas was a fashion statement that said, "young, with obnoxiously rich parents."

"So how do I look, Uncle?" Tomas said.

"Like my sister is spoiling you."

"Sialian'll turn green tonight at the ambassador's ball."

"The pointy eared vixen you're going to marry?"

"That was three days ago, we broke up four times since."

"You plan on winning her back tonight?"

"Dis, no! I'm through with her and her treacherous kind," Tomas said.

"Elves?"

"Women!"

"Ah," Eleszar took off his glasses and wiped them with the edge of his chocolate-stained shirt. "Well, shame then, you won't be interested."

"Interested?"

"A friend asked if I knew of anyone who could show her a good time tonight."

"One of your Elementalists colleagues? You know I'm uncomfortable with women smarter than me."

"That really narrows the list, eh? No, I can safely say she's a real bubble-head."

"Dog ugly, then."

"You're deep as a puddle, Nephew."

"I know. She's exciting as a Great Library bookworm?"

"The lady could teach you a thing or two about partying."

"That's from someone whose last ball has been, what? Like, before the Scourge?"

"I'm thirty-seven, Tomas."

"What did I say? Antique!"

"I'll tell her you're not interested."

"Whoa, did you hear me say that? I just want to know if I would get Sialian's attention with her on my arm," Tomas said.

"You know what, let's go see her and you can decide for yourself."

"You mean she's here?"

"Not exactly. Follow me!"

\*\*\*\*\*

"It's bloody cold!" Tomas stood panting on the roof of Eleszar's laboratory. In the last rays of the sun, the valley beneath the Throalic Mountains stretched all the way to the edge of Blood Wood. The air rushed around them, carrying with it the whining cry of a lone wolf. "Why are we here? This wind is messing up my hairdo."

"The lady likes open spaces."

"She's riding an airship?"

"Something like that. Now be quiet!" Eleszar leaned on the alabaster roof. A circle with a radius of ten feet was etched in gold and black on the solid surface. Red candles stood poised at regular intervals around the circle's edge. Despite the chilly wind, none of the little flames were flickering. Eleszar started intoning in a



strange language, softly at first, but growing louder with every syllable. Behind him, Tomas' hairs stood on his nape like soldiers. The chant built to a crescendo, and Tomas caught a glimpse of something moving within the circle. Suddenly, the wind picked up and the candles snuffed, leaving only traces of smoke. Eleszar stood triumphant.

"That's him?" a feminine voice sounded from behind them.

Tomas almost fell off the roof.

When he was later asked what the most special feature about her was, Tomas, without thinking, answered, "Everything."

Her laughter that was wind chimes in a soft breeze, her eyes were ice yet had warmth, her perfect lips tasted of fresh dawn, her skin was sometimes ocean deep and sometimes almost transparent, and she could float in midair. There was nothing unspecial about her.

Yet, if he was pressed for one choice, he had to admit it was her hair. It was silk, colored like the clearest sky and, untouched by the wind, it swayed to its own rhythm. "To put your hand through that hair," Tomas later said to anybody who was willing to listen, "is happiness. Pure and simple happiness. When I saw her on the roof of my uncle's laboratory, it was the first time in written history that I stood speechless because of a woman." Maybe, that's the reason for what she said next:

"He doesn't look like much."

"I know, Milady," Eleszar said. "Your average young, handsome, rich, shallow party animal. Would you like to call the deal off?"

"A bargain's a bargain. Is he a virgin?" she asked.

"What deal?" Tomas snapped out of his numbness.

"He looks like a virgin, you know I like men with some experience," she said.

"If there's a deal, then I want the details," Tomas said.

"A virgin?" Eleszar scratched the bald spot on top of his head, "Have you ever been with a lady, Tomas? I mean, intimate like?"

"WHAT DEAL?" Tomas' shout surprised the three of them.

"He's a bit loud," she said. "Do you have other nephews?"

"I've already told you, Tomas," Eleszar said, "You'll escort Milady Ariela to the ball tonight; that sums your part."

"But she's..." Tomas felt his cheeks light on fire.

"Unearthly, majestic?" she suggested.

"Exotically ethereal?" Eleszar gave Tomas a

glance that warned him to be at least vague, if not polite.

Tomas' face betrayed a moment of struggle. Then he bowed like a true gentleman. "What I meant to say, Lady Ariela, is that I've never dreamed such a beauty as yours existed on earth."

"Or in the Realm of Elemental Air," Eleszar said.

She smiled. It ached simply to watch her do it. "Shall we?" She offered her hand and pulled Tomas off the roof. His moment of panic turned to wonder when, instead of plummeting into the abyss, they started floating like two feathers.

"Be gentle Milady," Eleszar called after their fading forms. "He's my favorite nephew."

## Spirits with Personality

Quoting Sol Stein on writing: "Some writers who write category books (e.g., adventure, spy, westerns, fantasy, romance) start with a plot, then populate it with characters. That method usually results in hackwork, at which some writers have become so skilled that they have made millions with stories that even their devoted readers acknowledge seem made up."

Contrary to belief, it is not a marvelous plot or genius style that makes an excellent story, but rather the characters that struggle, love, and die within its pages. Do you remember the actors or the plot from the movies that have touched you? Take, for example, Ian Fleming's 007. He's a resourceful guy, but as flat as they come; we do not care what happens to James Bond one minute after we put the book down or leave the theater. Just to prove the point, compare the English super-agent with Lady Macbeth, Captain Ahab, Huckleberry Finn, and Scarlet O'Hara.

The same story-writing rule applies to writing adventure modules and running RPG sessions. The more alive, robust, rich, and colorful the NPC you create, the better impact your game session will have. The most boring and trivial game plot (guarding a caravan or defending a village against bandits immediately come to mind) can become a memorable experience if you liven it with a cast of unique NPCs.

Named spirits have great potential, which is often ignored in *Earthdawn*. *Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets* states that elementals and spirits are individuals with unique characteristics. Each follows an agenda and has goals, obscure though they might be. In the words of *Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets* (78), "Despite their mysterious behavior, spirits do seem to possess personalities as distinct as any Name-giver. Each individual spirit is a unique creature with a unique outlook."

“Unique” is the keyword in describing Named spirits. Astral beings are not governed by the same limitations as Name-giver NPCs. Their size, shape, powers, and personality are only limited by the wild imagination of the GM. With a little planning, NPC spirits can cause a game session to become one that will be remembered fondly by players and GM alike.

## Creating a Spirit with Personality

The first step in creating a unique spirit is to define its purpose in life. The primary purpose of any living being is existence. In reality, most of us spend our days mostly existing. Reality doesn't cut it for *homo-fictus*. Unlike us, he should always have something he wants, and want it now, even if he only wants a glass of water. A good fiction character should never wander around aimlessly, he should have a Goal.

What are the goals of the average spirit?

The basic goal of every living being (not just astral beings) is to exist. What makes an astral being so special is what it requires for existence. Take Horrors, for example. Horrors are distinguished because their existence demands Name-givers suffering. Following that line of thought, new types of unique spirits can be invented. Imagine spirits hailing from nether-realms, which gain nourishment from Name-givers' love, passion, laughter, the blood of windlings, old socks, or all of the above.

Remember that many Named spirits have been Name-givers in past lives. Most probably should have descendants still hanging around, which they want to help, torment, kill, encourage, send a message to, or all of the above. Many of those who have been Name-givers have tasks left undone. The tasks may be as mundane as making sure one's daughter marries a proper husband or as exciting as avenging their own murder.

Elementals also have goals on the mundane plane that are usually nature related. Their aims come into conflict with those of Name-givers when the latter abuse natural resources and disregard the consequences of doing so. A wood elemental could easily turn his life goal into vengeance against all Name-givers when he sees a beautiful grove razed for firewood. Such an elemental would be extremely reluctant to help its summoner and would

use every opportunity to flee its shackles and extract vengeance.

The previous examples are the default choices for Named spirits. Sometimes, not limiting yourself to clichés can result in the most interesting spirits. How about an air elemental whose goal in life is to party all night? A fire elemental colder than Leonard Nimoy (Star Trek's Spock)? A proud member of the Throalic firemen brigade who is also a water elemental? How about a Named spirit of a dead Throalic king who wishes to rule again and plans to overthrow the upstart House Avalus? Remember to keep your players guessing. A life goal of a nether creature can be anything from preparing for the invasion of their race to collecting funny hats.

## Appearance/ Manifestation

Here again, the possibilities are limitless; why should physical rules should apply to manifesting astral beings? The more powerful a spirit is, the less its form should be limited. While most spirits who were Name-givers in a previous life would choose to manifest in their previous form, it doesn't have to be the rule. How about an Adept spirit who manifests as a dog riding a donkey and balancing plates on his butt? How about a three-headed combination of an ork, t'skrang, and windling sitting on the body of a troll? Depending on the GM's aim, a spirit's image could be funny, scary, or sad.

Even if you use a Name-giver appearance for your manifesting spirits, there should always be a special characteristic that differentiates your spirits. Use flowing lava hair, a bloated or shrunk head, a strong sulfur smell, or whatever strikes you as appropriate for the spirit.

### Location:

Some spirits' Patterns seem to be connected to a certain region. An area can be something as big as the Aras Sea or as small as a rock or plant. Spirits connected to a region will be more likely to manifest voluntarily within that area's boundaries. The Shadowmant Inn for instance, might have a three-inch drunkard that consumes huge amounts of beer and never pays its tab. The Aras Sea could have a ghost ship that disappears whenever it's approached.

## Wrapping it all up





After you've determined what makes your spirit tick and how and where it manifests, you can decide on its personality traits. In some campaigns, elementals and spirits are usually summoned for the sake of their "special powers." They are "used" just like a sword is used for fighting or an airship is used to get from point A to point B. It makes them nothing better than a list of numbers. It is much more fun, however, to paint them in vivid color, give them eccentric personalities and wild characteristics.

How much should you invest in creating a spirit personality? Obviously, it depends on the size of its role in your campaign. Even an NPC with single appearance should have some trait that would signify him above the masses. You can use something minor like extraordinary

footwear, anything that would momentarily put your NPC in the spotlight. The trick to creating memorable NPCs is to choose a single characteristic and maximize it; a porter spirit who is like Cosmo Cramer on a bad balance day, a melancholic air elemental, a perverted tree spirit, or a manic-depressive water spirit. Imagine a bone spirit saying something extremely obscene when it is summoned. How about if the next time a thief reaches his

hand into someplace he shouldn't, the Pocket Guardian says, "Oooohhh, that feels realllllly good, a little lower please."

Presented here are few examples of unique spirits you can incorporate into your game. The attributes for each spirit are listed following its introduction.

## Doozer Inside the Pot

—From the account of Odone Strong Fist, hero and War-

The axe I found inside Kaer Morkom was an enigma. All my inquiries in the Great Library of Throal produced zilch, not a shred of a clue. I was kind of desperate when I heard of an old witch named Magi One-Tooth. She was said to be a Wizard that lived up in the mountains and dealt with these sorts of things. Magi's home was only half a day's walk from Bartertown. I was expecting a hovel, but Magi lived in a big estate protected by massive walls. She had a small army of servants who kept it spotless and always smelling of jasmine. Apparently, she was a trader in exotic goods and her number one product was magical information. Magi One-Tooth chose seclusion from Throal only so she could avoid taxes, not

because she's an old weirdo like her name suggests.

"I may be able to help you, Odone, but there's a price," Magi said.

"I have gold." I slapped my pouch, letting the coins inside jingle.

"Me, too." Magi smiled, and I was surprised to see she had a complete set of perfect, white teeth. We walked into a living room decorated with paintings and statues by the finest Throal artists. A masterpiece of a mahogany table stood in the middle of the room, created by someone who knew his business. It had a beautiful

engraving of the Earthdawn sailing over Throal. Sitting on top of it was a huge, ugly old pot. Inside sat a naked, wizened, windling-like creature with a potbelly and torn butterfly wings.

"Who's the clown?" the creature asked.

"Now, behave, Mr. D," Magi said. "Odone is our guest."

"Lemme see the chopper!" the little creature said.



"The what?" I said

"Ozymandias, save us from idiots!" the creature shrilled. "They come with big size and small brains these days."

"Why you..."

"Gimme the axe, dumb-ass."

"I'll give you something, all right!" I grabbed the damn pot and raised it above my head—and that's the last thing I remember. When I woke up an hour later, I was still in the room lying on a couch. A sweet looking servant girl held a damp towel to my aching head.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Sorry about that, but I couldn't let you hurt Mr. D," Magi said.

"That ugly imp in a jar? You keep damn strange pets, Miss Magi."

"The magic must have done something to his brain." I heard a familiar shrill coming from the table. "Before he was stupid and disgusting and now he's quite the opposite: he's disgusting and stupid."

"Now, now," Magi said. "Stop it or there will be no bat stew tonight." At that, the little creature went silent, and Magi continued. "Mr. D has checked on your axe while you were, ahem, out. He has two pieces of the axe puzzle solved."

I sat up. "He knows its maker?"

"Slow down big boy, there's the matter of price first. A village thirty miles from here has an infestation of chimeras."

"Say no more," I jumped up on wobbly legs. "Consider the matter closed."

"The wheel is turning but the hamster is dead," the creature made another rude noise.

"Mr. D! You know what happens when you overdo this."

"His brain inside of a pea would have been a rattle." The little creature started to giggle hysterically at his own stupid joke. Suddenly, I felt an unpleasant sulfur-like smell tickling my nose.

"Sweet Passions, Mr. D! Control yourself; you'll stink up the room."

"Come on, put his brain inside a chicken and it would start running backward."

At that, Magi put the lid on the pot. "Where were we?" she said. "Ah, price. If I wanted dead chimeras I could have sent my guards to do the job. I want you to capture me a live one."

"How am I supposed to do that?" I raised my arms. "That's impossible."

"Not my problem," Magi said. "That's the deal. Take it or leave it."

I packed my things and said my good-byes. At the

## Doozer Inside the Pot

DEX: 4   STR: 5   TOU: 4  
PER: 3   WIL: 4   CHA: 3

Initiative: 5/D8  
Number of Attacks: 1  
Attack: 5/D8  
Damage: 5/D8  
Number of Spells: 0  
Spellcasting: NA  
Effect: NA

Physical Defense: 8  
Spell Defense: 8  
Social Defense: 6  
Physical Armor: 5  
Mystic Armor: 5  
Knockdown: 8/2D6  
Recovery Tests: 1

Unc. Rating: Immune  
Death Rating: 25  
Wound Threshold: 6

Combat Move: Immobile  
Full Move: Immobile

Powers: Aid Summoner, Astral Sight 15/D20+D6, Item History 28/D20+2D10+D8, Life Sense 15/D20+D6, Manifest.

Legend Points: 30  
Equipment: None  
Loot: None

### Item History

Step: 28/D20+2D10+D8

Doozer has studied threaded items for centuries. He uses this talent so efficiently that he needs only half an hour of studying the item before he can perform the test.

### Commentary

There are countless netherworlds supporting countless life forms. Doozer Inside the Pot lives in a desolate corner of the netherworlds, which is so alien that he needs a small piece of his world in order to manifest in ours. Magi brought back Doozer and his pot from a dangerous voyage in the netherworlds. The pot is a Pattern Item for Doozer, and when manifesting on this plane of existence, Doozer cannot leave his pot without dying. He is an obnoxious little smart-ass of a spirit. He swears a lot and constantly mocks everyone around him. He seems to worship some unknown being called Ozymandias, though he will not tell who or what this being is. When he makes fun of people, he sometimes passes sulfurous gas that spoils the atmosphere around him even further. Magi summons him only because of his unique ability to learn a Thread Item's history.

Magi has her own agreement with Doozer that includes his favorite dish, bat soup. From those who seek knowledge, Magi's price is in the form of a favor. She is a collector and avid researcher of magical beings, and for her favor, she often requests the carcass or even live sample of some wild magical creature she wishes to study.



## Maroon the Shooter

Elf Eighth Circle Archer, Eighth Circle Thief

DEX: 9 STR: 7 TOU: 5  
PER: 7 WIL: 7 CHA: 4

Initiative: 10/D10+D6  
Number of Attacks: 1  
Attack: By talent  
Damage: By weapon  
Number of Spells: 0  
Spellcasting: NA  
Effect: NA

Physical Defense: 13  
Spell Defense: 11  
Social Defense: 6  
Physical Armor: 0  
Mystic Armor: 2  
Knockdown: 8/2D6  
Recovery Tests: 2

Unc. Rating: Immune  
Death Rating: 79  
Wound Threshold: 8

Combat Move: 65  
Full Move: 130

Karma Points: 5

Karma Step: 4/D6

### Talents

Anticipate Blow 8  
Avoid Blow 8  
Bank Shot 8  
Call Arrow 8  
Climbing 8  
Conceal Weapon 8  
Detect Trap 8  
Detect Weapon 8  
Direction Arrow 8  
Disarm Trap 8  
Disguise Self 8  
Durability (6/5) 8  
Eagle Eye 8  
First Impression 8  
Flame Arrow 8  
Impressive Shot 8  
Karma Ritual 8  
Leadership 5  
Lightning Throw 8  
Lock Pick 8  
Melee Weapons 8  
Missile Weapon 8  
Mystic Aim 8  
Pick Pockets 8  
Second Shot 8  
Silent Walk 8  
Speak Language 8  
Sprint 8  
Stopping Aim 8  
Streetwise 8  
Surprise Strike 8  
Thread Weaving - Arrow 8  
Thread Weaving - Thief 8  
Throwing Weapons 8  
Trap Initiative 8  
True Shot 8  
Wound Balance 8

15/D20+D6  
17/D20+D10  
17/D20+D10  
15/D20+D6  
17/D20+D10  
15/D20+D6  
15/D20+D6  
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15/D20+D6  
17/D20+D10  
15/D20+D6  
—  
15/D20+D6  
12/2D10  
18/D20+D12  
17/D20+D10  
—  
9/D8+D6  
17/D20+D10  
17/D20+D10  
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12/2D10  
15/D20+D6  
17/D20+D10  
15/D20+D6  
15/D20+D6  
17/D20+D10  
17/D20+D10  
17/D20+D10  
15/D20+D6

Legend Points: 682,090  
Equipment: None  
Loot: None

door I heard the annoying voice of Mr. D, “BON VOYAGE, DUMB-ASS.”

## Maroon the Shooter

—From the account of Alex Jitter Fingers, a thief of Kratas

I spent the entire night of the Cheese Festival getting drunk at the wharf, so I was absent when Jacobbi's goons trashed my place. I felt lucky because if they had found me, my face would have been redecorated as



well. Also, I felt twice as lucky because they missed the loose board under my bed beneath which I kept my true valuables. Mistress Fortune and I were always on the best of terms, but not wishing to abuse her generosity, I decided it was time to relocate. I was tossing my few belongings into a traveling pack when the sharp end of a crossbow bolt pressed into my neck.

“Going somewhere, Alex?” a cold voice said.

I almost died on the spot—not only because of the closeness of the sharp point to my favorite neck, but because I knew the voice too well. “Turn around,” the cold voice said.

I did as I was told and my bowels failed me, “M, Ma, Maroon?” I stuttered.

“Who did you figure?” He looked just as he did a year ago and smelled of damp smog and dark deeds.

“I was kind of expecting Jacobbi's men,” I said.

"I thought I was Jacobi's man," he said, quietly.

"Didn't he make you dance the noose?"

Maroon touched a crude rope scar around his neck. "He did."

"Look, Maroon, I didn't have anything to do with it; I'm glad you escaped."

He looked at me and his eyes were two pit-holes of smoldering fire. "Put on something clean, Alex, we're going for a walk."

We stalked the dark alleys for an hour. Even though the shadows were my friends, I was too scared to try a mad dash to freedom. Maroon's soft breath was at my back, and he could nail a gutter rat at two hundred yards in pitch darkness. I glanced once behind me and felt my blood turn to solid ice. Maroon's silhouette was almost transparent in the moonlight, and he didn't cast a shadow. Dark thoughts lapped at the edge of my consciousness.

"I heard Jacobi burned your body. How did you escape?" I asked him suddenly.

"I didn't say I did," he answered, "Here we are."

We arrived at the Smiling Star, a gambling den and Jacobi's headquarters.

"Go into the street," he said. "Call Jacobi outside, tell him you have his money and that you have come here with honor to cut a deal."

"He'll kill me."

"And you think I won't? Go! I'll be right here watching you."

Without many options to choose from, I stepped into the lighted street and hollered for Jacobi. Fortunately, he was an uplands troll and his fake sense of honor wouldn't let him send his goons to do me in since I had confronted him in the open. Thus, he showed up himself, escorted by Bruza, a former scorcher who was now his right hand. Two ugly tuskers dogged their heels, sniffing at the shadows.

"You got some nerve, Alex," Jacobi told me. He walked up slowly and pulled out a Cathayan long dagger. Suddenly, Bruza gave a shout and clutched his eye: a dark crossbow bolt was sticking out from it. Jacobi tried to stab me, but another bolt got him in the leg and he crumbled to the ground. His ork bodyguards tried to drag him inside, but two well-aimed bolts hit each in the throat; they were dead before they hit the ground. The guard at the Smiling Star door started running towards his boss but made it only two steps into the street before a bolt found him, too.

Maroon stepped into the light. The lithe, dark elf had both his crossbows cocked. "Nice night, Jacobi." He stood over the prone troll.

Jacobi's face was a mask of fear and rage. "Where

## Maroon the Shooter

(Continued)

### Dark Arrow

Step: 18/D20+D12

Maroon can create a magical bolt for his crossbow every other round. When firing this Dark Arrow Maroon uses his Dark Arrow step for his Attack Test and must overcome the target's Physical or Spell Defense (whichever is higher). A success means the bolt hits and does Step 20 damage (Maroon's Strength + crossbow bolt damage + 8).

### Shadow Walk

Step: 26/D20+D10+D8+D6

Maroon can make his body become almost transparent when walking in shadows. He combines both his Silent Walk talent (Rank 9, Step 17) with this ability to become almost undetectable. Like with Silent Walk, Maroon rolls his Shadow Walk step and the result becomes the Difficulty Number for a Perception Test to notice him move.

### Commentary

Maroon the Shooter was a hit man for one of the local Kratas crime lords. A Thief and an Archer Adept, Maroon used his magical talents to build a successful career. Maroon was so successful that his boss suspected, with a certain degree of justification, that he was planning a take over. Before the killer could make his move, the crime lord ordered Maroon hanged and his body cremated.

A year later, a Nethermancer summoned Maroon's spirit using one of his famous crossbows as a Pattern Item. In the contest of wills that ensued between the vengeful spirit and the Nethermancer, the latter lost both the contest and his life. Maroon took his crossbows and went on a vengeance rampage through Kratas.

He then disappeared and surfaced in Travar three months later. Three months after that he was in Urupa. In both cities, he picked a local crime syndicate and assassinated some of its top members. Over the years he's appeared across Barsaive and beyond, always following a similar pattern. He arrives, assassinates a major crime persona, and then goes dormant for a few months or years. The truth is that he is being summoned periodically by a Theran Nethermancer for his assassination skills and flexible morals. Maroon has made several hits on the Empire's enemies. He has performed these killings more or less willingly, because the Nethermancer has always granted his request for free time to roam. During this free roaming, Maroon chooses a target, usually a head of a crime organization, and assassinates him. Nobody knows why he does this, though most of his targets have an obvious connection to his past life.

Maroon is an Eighth Circle Archer and an Eighth Circle Thief. He is summoned with the Ritual of the Ghost Master, retaining all his talents from his lifetime and gaining some new and frightening powers.



## The Prankster

Strength 3 Named Spirit

DEX: 8 STR: 9 TOU: 8  
PER: 10 WIL: 8 CHA: 7

Initiative: 9/D8+D6  
Number of Attacks: 1  
Attack: 9/D8+D6  
Damage: 12/2D10  
Number of Spells: 1  
Spellcasting: 20/D20+D8+D6  
Effect: 8/2D6

Physical Defense: 12  
Spell Defense: 15  
Social Defense: 12  
Physical Armor: 6  
Mystic Armor: 5  
Knockdown: 10/D10+D6  
Recovery Tests: 4

Unc Rating: 38  
Death Rating: 46  
Wound Threshold: 13

Combat Move: 120  
Full Move: 240

Karma Points: 5

Karma Step: 6/D10

Powers: Aid Summoner, Astral Sight 9/D8+D6, Empathic Sense 8/2D6, Life Sense 9/D8+D6, Manifest, Spells: Despite being only a Strength 3 Named Spirit, the Prankster can cast Illusionist spells up to Eighth Circle.

Legend Points: 2,840  
Equipment: None  
Loot: None

### Commentary

The Prankster, or the Punisher as some call him, can manifest at will and in doing so, can imitate any Name-giver race, shape, or color he wishes. His real form is somewhat of an enigma but some who have seen him in astral form say he looks like a windling dressed as a clown.

The Prankster's goal in life seems to be playing foolish tricks on people. He usually punishes people with conspicuously negative traits. Lazy bums, spoiled brats, stiff-necked matrons, misers, and vain rich folk are among his favorite victims. The Prankster's sense of humor is very crude. He once made a respectable professor in Throal quit his job after he accompanied him for a week and farted loudly whenever the poor dwarf opened his mouth. He also once tricked an aging matron into losing her dress in the middle of a Throalic banquet.

The Prankster has a phobia of being summoned and has taken great care to hide every Pattern object he once owned deep in the bowels of astral space. Those who do find these objects and manage to summon the Prankster will find him a tough nut. He will refuse any request by his summoner and in a contest of wills, the Prankster rolls Step 20 instead of his Willpower step.

by Death's Sea did you come from?"

"I've been to Death's Sea, Jacobi, nothing special about it."

Jacobi tried to spit on Maroon but the killer put a bolt through his skull. Without giving me a second glance, Maroon then put another bolt through Jacobi's chest and blinked out of existence.

## The Prankster

—From the account of Sam Buster, a famous bum of Uru-pa

Thirsty, like every other night, the boys from the harbor and me go to Ursula's Nest and boy do I gets the shock of me life. Who do I see sitting on a tall stool gulping shots like there's no tomorrow, if not my old man? Well, Pop always was keen on his liquor and this was his favorite spot, so I reckoned it was okay. What strikes me as odd, though, is the fact that the dumb bastard has been dead as a nail for eleven years now.

So, I walk in and think to myself, "This is probably a mistake," when the chap turns to me, and says, "Oi, Sam Buster, how's tricks?"

I look at him crooked and say, "How'd ya know me name, chief?"

"I'm yer pa, ya ungrateful son-of-a-bitch."

"You sure curse like the old miser," I say, "but yoose can't be him b'cause me dad was buried under the pine eleven years ago."

"That was an ash tree, you stupid donkey," he says.

I remember he is right and I start to shake all over like I have the swamp fever. I mean, Pa had left me with a small shoe store to run and he probably found out that I'd sold it and invested the money in booze. "It wasn't my idea to sell the shop," I lie.

"Forget the store, you stupid ass," he says, "I came back because of the money. I left it buried inside a red cask under the old oak in the yard."

"What money?" I say, but damn me if he ain't starting to flicker like a lamp who's run out of oil, then he disappears like he had never been there in the first place.

Sure enough, I run outside and buy a shovel. I sweat three days like a mad hog under that oak. Finally, I find the cask but inside there are only three coppers.

"Up here!" Someone shouts at me from one of the oak's winding branches. I look up from the hole and see my old man sitting there grinning like a dwarf who just found out he can shit diamonds. He looks like my pa but he's wearing the freakiest colored shirt and panta-loons, such as my old man would never have put on.

"Who're you?" I shout.

There's a puff of smoke, such as you see with fraud wizards at the fair, and suddenly there is a bejeweled mandolin in his hands. Now he surely doesn't look like me fat dead pa, but like one of them mad windlings. He shrinks in size, or maybe the tree gets bigger, he even grows dragonfly wings.

"Where's the gold?" I wave my shovel at him. He bows like a true actor and starts playing a merry tune.

*Here lies poor little sweaty Sam  
Who spent his life just like a bum.  
A mere smirch on his family name,  
To which he brought only shame.*

I shout up at him to stop, but he just laughs brightly and swaps out his mandolin for a lute.

*You live like a hog with no repent,  
Your pa's saving on ale all spent.  
If he saw you, he would choke,  
After which he'd have a stroke.*

*Three days you've toiled down in dirt  
Sweating through your shabby shirt,  
But no need for anger or to be so sad  
For that which I think you should be glad.*

*This taught you an honest job's worth  
Of getting money from the earth.  
It's a free lesson, poor dear Buster  
From your merry old friend the Prankster.*

After singing his stupid song, he bows again. I throw my shovel at him, but he simply ducks and flies away laughing.

## Old Man Smoke

— From the account of the Ch'oleti V'strimon, captain of the Floranuus' Glory riverboat

It had been a bad day for us. One of the engine's pistons blew up and left us crippled. What's worse, we had reports of a Henghyoke marauder boat seen nearby. I was swearing like mad at my chief engineer when this shady passenger approached me. He was a real character, a human Nethermancer by the name of Nerrison Brown.

"I know this ain't the best of times to disturb you, Sir," he said, "but I have a friend who can help."

"Can he magic me a new piston?" I said.

"He can keep the Henghyokes off your tail until you fix the broken one."

"Indeed so?" I said.

"But there's a catch," Nerrison said. "He'll want True fire kernels for his help."

I know adepts have some nifty tricks up their sleeves, and I was pretty desperate at that point, so I said, "Bring him on."

Nerrison walked to the stern and returned after several minutes escorted by the freakiest looking creature I've ever seen. He was a t'skrang, or was once, but his head was bloated like the biggest darn pumpkin I've ever seen, and he was smoking a pipe twice as long





## Old Man Smoke

Strength 7 Named Spirit

DEX: 11 STR: 13 TOU: 14  
PER: 10 WIL: 7 CHA: 7

Initiative: 11/D10+D8  
Number of Attacks: 4  
Attack: 11/D10+D8  
Damage: 22/D20+D10+D8  
Number of Spells: 1  
Spellcasting: 10/D10+D6  
Effect: 7/D12

Physical Defense: 14  
Spell Defense: 13  
Social Defense: 9  
Physical Armor: 8  
Mystic Armor: 3  
Knockdown: 13/D12+D10  
Recovery Tests: 7

Unc Rating: Immune  
Death Rating: 68  
Wound Threshold: 21

Combat Move: 100  
Full Move: 200

Powers: Aid Summoner, Astral Sight 15/D20+D6, Life Sense 15/D20+D6, Manifest, Smoke Screen 19/D20+2D6, Spells: Old Man Smoke casts spells as a Seventh Circle Nethermancer.

Legend Points: 1,4810  
Equipment: None  
Loot: None

### Smoke Screen

Step: 19/D20+2D6

When the mood strikes him, Old Man Smoke makes his pipe spill out a fog-like substance that slowly expands and encircles him. Almost instantly, the fog becomes almost thirty feet high and travels at the speed a man walks. Old Man Smoke can feed the fog ring for hours, causing it to grow up to a 2.5-mile radius circle around him. Old Man Smoke rolls his Smoke Screen step to determine how thick the fog is. The result is the Difficulty Number for anyone trying to spot objects hidden within the smoke from 10 yards away.

### Commentary

Old Man Smoke, or "Big Head" as he is sometimes called, is a Named spirit that manifests only in the vicinity of the Serpent River and its tributaries. People who have seen him manifest describe him as a gray-skinned t'skrang with a bloated head. He always carries a huge stone pipe at the corner of his mouth from which foul smelling vapors spew forth. Old Man Smoke appears to be a drifter of some sort. He enjoys manifesting and sitting idly, telling stories, playing cards, and fishing. He uses True Fire kernels to feed his stone pipe and is always willing to trade for this precious commodity.

Theories suggest that Old Man Smoke is the spirit of an ancient Syrtis t'skrang though he is quite obscure about his origins. He shows no political agenda and for a price he is willing to help any of the rival Serpent factions. Being very fond of card games, Old Man Smoke is sometimes willing to bet his services on a double or nothing card game. Few, however, ever managed to beat him. For those who seek lore of the Serpent River, Old Man Smoke is a treasure trove of the Serpent's stories and history.

as my tail. Smoke in all colors came out of that pipe and one whiff of it could make the toughest river man change colors.

"Captain Ch'oleti V'strimon," Nerrison said. "This is Old Man Smoke."

"He's your man?" I asked. "How is he gonna keep the Henghyokes away—make them laugh to death?"

"You have big yapper, Captain Ch'oleti," the creature said.

Now, I ain't no Swordmaster to duel at the drop of a hat, but nobody talks to me like that on my own boat. "I'll make you eat them words, pumpkin head," I said.

"Like you did with ol' Sieltech?"

That stopped me cold. My old partner, Sieltech, had croaked three years ago under, let's just say, inconvenient circumstances. "How is the old eel? Still holding a grudge against me in the afterlife?" I asked.

"He gave me a message to give you."

"Out with it, then."

"That will have to wait, unless you wish to speak with him yourself. I smell otters nearby."

His mentioning of the Henghyokes' favorite pets sobered me up real quick, and I set aside my fear of my long dead partner. After some haggling, we settled on the outrageous price of three True fire kernels. He then sat himself at the bow and started blowing symmetric smoke rings from his pipe. When the smoke touched water it didn't break, but expanded in all directions. In less than a heartbeat, the air around my boat was a wall of foul fog that kept expanding further up and down the river. I tell you, the Henghyokes might have gone three inches past our bow without them or us ever being the wiser. The creature kept the smoke up for a day and a half, plenty long enough for us to fix the engine. All that time he kept at the bow with Nerrison. I think they played cards, but I'm not sure.

When he was done, Old Man Smoke walked up to me. "There's one thing left," he said, and before I could figure his intention, he took his huge stone pipe out and dealt me a good dint on the side of the skull. "That's the message from your ol' partner," he said. Then he dealt me another dint on the other side of the head.

"What's that for?" I said, after I spat out some teeth.

"Oh, I've always been manic about symmetry," he said before vanishing into his smoke.

# THE FAMINE

by Catherine E. Norman

We used to dance through the fields, plucking sweet fruits whenever we wanted. We snacked in the town square and in our friends' houses. Mother liked to travel, so we never stayed in one place too long. She liked walking leisurely across the countryside, but we would always beg her to let us hitch a ride on an airship or a riverboat. Sailing through the clouds and bouncing along the waves was so much more fun!

Then came the famine. My sister, Parell, collapsed first. One day her spirit just couldn't take it anymore. She longed for food, rich delicious food, but everything we found was scrawny and weak, and none of it was filling. We needed more, but the crops had failed everywhere. The land was barren and empty.

Soon, my littlest sister, Laseer, was on the brink of death. She was so young, little more than an infant. If she didn't get a good, solid meal soon, she wouldn't make it. We all knew that, even though mother never said so. Mother never talked much, except to tell us that life was much worse back in the old country. The food there was bland and boring, and even the most pathetic tidbit we ate here was still better than what she used to have. We didn't believe her. We were young, and we were starving.

One day, we came across a dwarven village, deep in the mountains. It was amazing—even from a distance we could smell the delicious scents wafting from the cavern. Mother was afraid we wouldn't be welcome, even though we were so hungry. How could anyone turn away a starving infant? Mother forced us to wait in a small cave below the settlement while she approached alone.

I didn't see what happened. I heard mother shouting, begging the guard to let us in. She promised we didn't need much, just enough for Laseer. Couldn't they spare even one small meal for a child? Somebody big and brawny must have been guarding the gap in the town gates. Mother was quite a fighter, but she was lithe and quick, not huge and muscular. She didn't stand a chance after the guard grabbed her. She shouted at us to run. Flee! It was our only chance. If the guard caught us, he'd kill us too. Mother was obviously right, so I dashed down the hillside and flung myself into the river. I floated down-

stream with the fish and the debris, motionless as a log.

Laseer wasn't strong enough to flee. The guard caught her as she tried to follow me. I wasn't fool enough to try to save her. The guard was huge, and he had claws! My older sister, Gashtal, tried to be clever. She thought she could sneak into the cavern while the guard finished smashing mother. What an idiot. Did she really think she could survive in a town ruled by something bigger than that guard? She must have been overcome by the smell of so much food. I admit it was tempting; so many cattle all grouped together in one place. If I could have smuggled one out with me, I could have feasted for days—or perhaps months, if I just nibbled a little at a time. No, it would never have worked; I couldn't have protected my food that long. There were so many of us out there, roving around, searching for a morsel, any morsel.

I ate grass towards the end. Did you know you can cast a shadow over a blade of grass, give it just the tiniest hint of sunlight every few days, and then savor its search for where the sun went? And did you ever see the tiny little animals at the bottom of the red lava sea? They're hardly more than



dark specks of dust, but make the lava around them just a few degrees colder, and they start to squirm. They can sense that the lava is hotter a few millimeters away, and they try to swim towards the heat. You can survive off their search for warmer temperatures for days if you don't make the lava too cold; they are rather sensitive little creatures.

Not long ago, I was swimming in the lava sea, and something cast a shadow over me. The sky had been completely clear earlier, so it couldn't be a cloud. I hardly dared to hope! I cautiously swam towards the surface. It was an airship! Several of the crew were adepts; I could smell them. I wanted them, but I wasn't crazy enough to attack the ship. Back when mother was here, she would always mark the adepts first, and then we would all play with her pets.

Still, if adepts and airships were around, other food must have returned to the land. I left the lava sea, and I haven't looked back. What mother called the most delicious food in the netherworlds has returned. As soon as I'm strong enough, I'm going to mark an adept of my own—and I won't share it with anyone.



# PUTTING YU XIAO TO SLEEP

by Oren Shochat

It all came down to stinking money.

“Three hundred silver Therans?” Corrine raised his hands to the heavens, a caricature of a man pleading with the Passions. “Sweet Astendar’s teats, your old man has lost his marbles.”

Nurit’s pudgy palm slapped him lightly across the wrist. “Corrine Brandishaw, don’t you dare swear in the presence of your future wife!”

“I’m sorry, dove, but can’t you see how desperate I am? There’s no way I’m going to come up with that sort of money in a week.”

“Then Pa will marry me to Hans Kotovnik.”

“That stupid son-of-a-bitch? He’s so ugly he makes onions cry.”

“Hans is a nice, decent gentleman and he has a steady job.”

“At his father’s grocery—they keep him in the back so he won’t scare the customers off.”

“I’m sure he doesn’t swear all the time.”

Corrine tried to embrace her, but Nurit took a step back and pouted, her lips sticking out in the funny way they always did when she got upset. “Doesn’t your father want you to marry someone you love?” he asked.

“Pa wants only the best for me, he said I need someone who can support me.”

“But a three hundred silver dowry? That’s a rip-off!”

“I gather you don’t think I’m worth that much?” Danger lurked in her blue eyes.

“Come on, Nuni.” He used the nickname that always made her purr. “You know you’re worth more than the fortunes of Thera to me.” He tried to embrace her again and this time she consented. Her lips tasted of the sugar sweets she was so fond of.

After a while, she removed herself from his arms. “I need to get back. Dad will kill me if he finds I’ve been out. Don’t worry, Corri, I’m sure you’ll come up with something.” She peeked around the corner of the alley, making sure no one who knew her was in the street, and started running. Corrine could hear her short legs clapping on the pavestones. Their echoes took some time to die in his thoughts.

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“Why so sad, Colin-san?” Shi, his Cathayan neighbor asked him that night when, like every night, they sat together at the Happy Octopus bar.

“Money problems, Shi.” Corrine looked glumly at his empty wine cup.

“You want mally fat lady!” Shi had a knowing look

on his face.

“Yeah, well I know Nurit isn’t exactly Alachia of Blood Wood in the beauty department, but she’s warm and I like being with her. It’s not like I’m prince charming myself,” Corrine glanced at his delicate image in the mirror above the bar. “I mean, I always thought I’d marry her and then her father would give me some easy job, maybe even buy us a small house.”

“Small house?” Shi said.

“Yeah, you know, nothing fancy, with a small kitchen where she can cook for us and the three fat toddlers we’ll probably have. Maybe even a small lab for my experiments.”

“Don’t be sad, Colin-san, I buy you another dlink.”

Corrine put his hand on the small youth’s arm, “Thanks, but no more for me. Anyway, I’ve taken enough of your money.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Three days later, dawn caught Corrine in the same position, still brooding over cheap wine and not a copper piece richer. If anything, his life was about to take a turn for the worse. His landlord at the Happy Octopus inn threatened to throw him out if he didn’t come up with the rent. Corrine was so desperate he even considered going to his old master, Toleck, and begging the Elementalist to take him back.

Could the old miser have had a change of heart after two years? Not likely. The day before he attempted an open job at the docks.

“Sorry Corrine, but I can’t hire you,” Dockmaster Pinar had told him when he applied.

“Why not? I can weave True air ten times faster than anyone you have here.”

“I know you’re a good Elementalist, Corrine, but that’s a strict order from the guild. Toleck is pulling the strings. He doesn’t want you to work in this town again.”

“All I did was blow up his lab a bit, it’s not like I slept with his wife.”

Pinar shrugged, “Sorry kid, you know how it goes.”

Corrine did, though the knowledge didn’t bring him any happiness or food to his plate. The three hundred silvers Nurit’s father demanded could have been three hundred gold for all it mattered; both sums looked as far away as the moon. He sipped cheap ale from the dirty glass in front of him and brooded some more. The prospect of marrying Nurit looked further away than ever. Yesterday he spotted her strolling down Urupa’s main street, hand

in hand with Hans Kotovnik. It only added to his overall feeling of misery.

"Colin-san! Colin-san! Quickly! Come!"

Corrine turned bleary eyed. His Cathayan neighbor dashed down the stairs with a look of pleading urgency written on his peculiar features. Shi ended his mad dash in front of Corrine's barstool, blushed, and started bowing-apologetically. "Colin-san!"

"Whoa there! Deep breaths, Shi, slow down. What happened?"

"Yu Xiao dead! Come quick. We fity-fity." The Cathayan made some obscure gestures.

"What? Who is Yuxi for Garlen's sake? Aren't you supposed to be on your boat already?"

The Cathayan shook his head, "No fish today, Colin-san. Yu Xiao come for dead song, you come put to sleep. Vely cold."

"Put some dead guy to sleep, that doesn't make any sense!" Corrine said.

"Yes, you put to sleep. Vely cold., brrr... Please, Colin-san."

"Cold? It's hot as the bottom of Death's Sea outside, Shi," Corrine said. The Cathayan looked ready to burst into tears from frustration. "Okay, I'm coming. Just let me change clothes."

"No time, Colin-san, must hully. We fity-fity."

"Crazy Cathayan," Corrine mumbled and followed the fisherman outside.

\*\*\*\*\*

Corrine wasn't native to Urupa and thus had no sea legs. Turning greener with every sway of the boat, he just hoped he didn't look as bad as he felt. The Su family around him didn't appear to suffer from the same ailment. They ran up and down the length of the longboat chattering in their strange language, and if anything could be deciphered from their alien features, it was impatient excitement. The sun bore down cruelly and they all stripped down to the waist, even Shi's beautiful sister, Mai. Corrine tried very hard not to stare, though one time when she caught him peeking, she gave him a warm smile, which sent his heart racing like a thundra charger.

"Not long, Colin-san. Yu Xiao dead! We fity-fity," Shi smiled at him.

"Sure, whatever, as long as we don't miss dinner," Corrine said, though the picture of dinner sent waves of bile up his throat. He noticed that each family member wore a blue octopus tattoo on his or her chest and wondered if

they belonged to some obscure cult. Did their choice of inn tie into it at all?

What did he actually know of this fishing family? Practically nothing.

They came to the Happy Octopus six months ago from across the Aras sea. They were a soft spoken and polite family of sea farers who all looked alike, short and slim with coal black, silky hair and large almond eyes. Corrine befriended Shi immediately. Though language was still a barrier, he found a kindred spirit in the young fisherman and used to sit for hours with him drinking wine and trying to teach him proper Throalic. Now he wondered if it wasn't a mistake. He didn't have much time to wonder, though. Climbing ropes with the same dexterity he'd seen monkeys grab the Servos mother trees, the Cathayan family lowered the sails. Everyone looked busy except for beautiful Mai, who stood like an alabaster statue at the bow and started singing in a strange, ear-itching language.

"Crazy Cathayans," Corrine said.

"Colin-san," Shi pointed at the water. "See, now Yu Xiao coming."

"I thought you said he was dead?"

There was a sudden lurch in the water around them. Something big was coming from below. A huge, pale yellowish, snake-like creature parted the waves and rose ever higher above the boat's mast.

"It's a sea dragon," Corrine screamed.

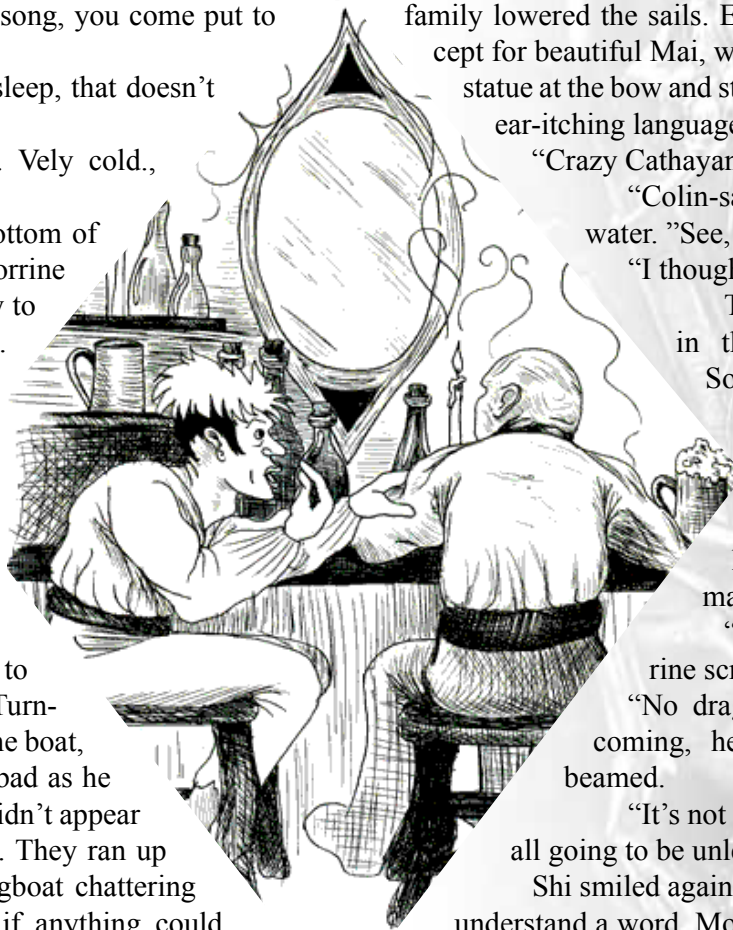
"No dragon, Colin-san. Yu Xiao coming, he dead," Shi practically beamed.

"It's not dead, you idiot, but we're all going to be unless you raise your sails."

Shi smiled again, a sure sign that he didn't understand a word. More snake like things started rising out of the water; each was the width of the entire boat. They circled the boat in a strange pattern. Something else rose from the depths with them, a cone shaped yellowish mound, seaweeds clinging to its rough rubbery skin. A crack opened in the middle of the cone and Corrine had to force all his will to control his bladder when a colossal, intelligent, and cruel eye blinked at him.

"A bloody kraken! At least I'll die knowing I've been eaten by a myth."

"See, it's Yu Xiao!" Shi almost shouted with joy. "He live a thousand seasons and now he come for death song. Watch, Colin-san. This you will tell your sons and





their sons.” As he spoke, Mai hoisted a huge harpoon used for baiting sharks and, with one deft movement, cast it. It flew a perfect arc and speared the middle of the huge eye.

\*\*\*\*\*

Ten hours later, they reached a desolate shore with high basalt peaks rising high above it. They could have made it sooner, but the Cathayans insisted on dragging the colossal body behind them. The Su family navigated their boat carefully between the shoals into a yawning cave. Inside, someone had arrayed rows of barrels.

“That’s True water and True air in those barrels,” Corrine said.

“Yes Colin-san, you put Yu Xiao to sleep vely, vely cold. We fity-fity,” Shi said.

“Sleep? It’s dead, I can’t put it to sleep.”

The entire Su family looked at him expectantly.

“Look, it’s already asleep you crazy Cathayans. It can’t get any more sleepy than that.”

“But it bleaks.” Shi made a gesture of a man cracking a branch.

Corrine slapped his forehead. “You want me to preserve Yu Xiao in True air and True water so it won’t decompose. Well, that’s bloody Dis of a lot of work, we’ll be here all night.”

The Cathayan youth almost jumped out of his skin with excitement. “Colin-san make Yu Xiao sleep vely, vely cold, we fity-fity.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Three days later, Corrine came back to the Happy Octopus to find what little stuff his room contained waiting for him on the pavement. Where would he go now? He flipped his last silver in the air, failed to catch it, and watched sadly as it rolled into the gutter.

“Now you can’t get more symbolic than that,” he said to no one in particular.

“Colin-san, Colin-san.” Shi’s ten-year old brother tugged at his sleeve.

“Now what? You killed a dragon and you want me to skin it?” he said.

Having nothing better to do, he followed the boy straight to the wharf, where a long line of Name-givers of all races stood in front of a makeshift stall. The boy dragged him to the beginning of the line, forcing Corrine to suffer some insulting remarks about line cutters and the destiny of his mother. The entire Su family stood there rolling green seaweed around white grains of rice and a suspiciously familiar looking yellowish, rubber-like substance.

“Give me fifty more of them rascals, how’d you call them? Sumo? Saki? And some green spicy sauce.” The ork at the front of the line looked far too well dressed to be considered one of the regular wharf shoppers.

Shi spotted Corrine and beamed as usual. “Colin-san, want sushi?”

Corrine shook his head, dazed. “No, I think I’ll pass today. Wouldn’t Yu Xiao be a bit upset about this? I mean, well you know what I mean.”

“No, Yu Xiao happy make sushi, make Su big money. Su happy. Big money.”

“Yes, I can see that.” Corrine observed the long line of shoppers. It seemed to be growing.

“Big money.” Shi pulled a chest from below the makeshift counter and poured a small fortune in coppers, silvers, and golds.

“Put that away you crazy Cathayan, people are watching.”

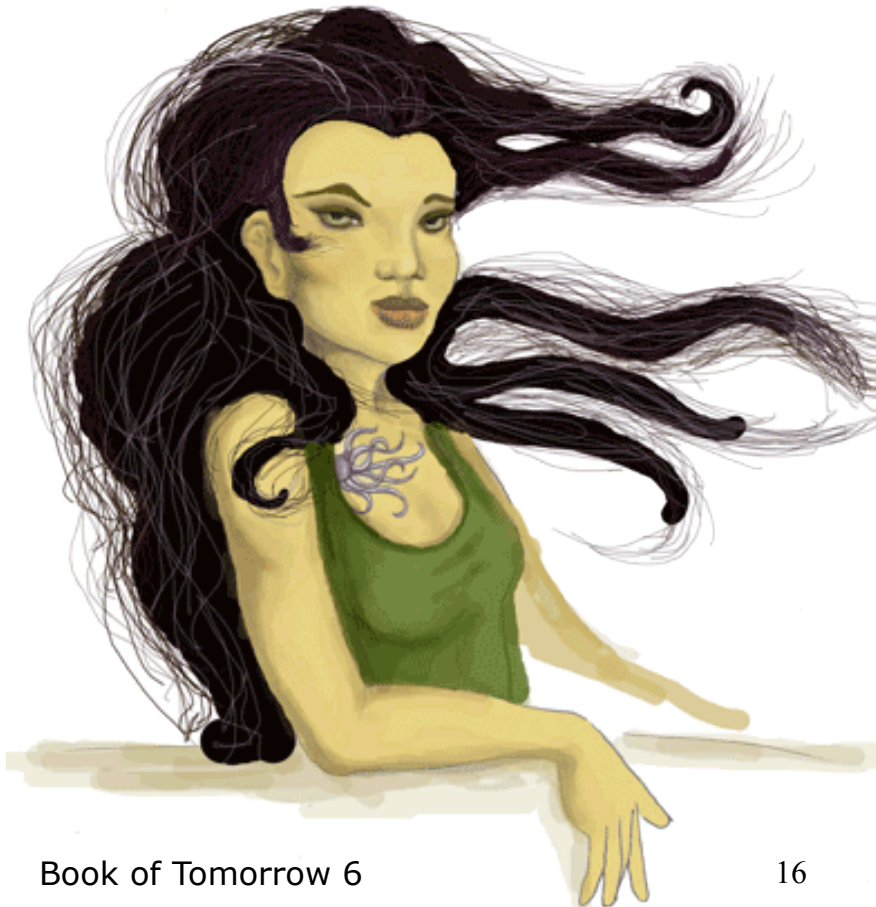
Instead of putting the money back, Shi split the pile in half. “We fity-fity.”

Corrine stared at the pile, blinked, and looked back at Shi. For the first time in his life, he didn’t have anything to say.

“You take money, go quickly mally fat lady, no?”

Corrine looked at the pile again, looked in the direction of Nurit’s home, looked back at the pile, then at Shi’s sister. Mai stood like the rest of the family behind the counter rolling Yu Xiao bits with superhuman speed. The girl nodded at him and gave him that heart-twisting smile of hers.

“You know what, Shi,” Corrine said. “No need to rush anything, no need to be rash at all.”



# COST OF VALOR

A mysterious journey into the Servos reveals unknown dangers.

by Danielle Mallette

Far off in the distance a thunderclap sounded; the darkness quivered for a moment as lightning passed somewhere overhead. Heavy rivulets of water fell in torrents and slithered through the dark green leaves of the tall canopy, twisting and writhing their way down the thick vines and sturdy branches, giving birth to countless miniscule versions of the tributaries that fed the Serpent. At journey's end, the streams finally found release hurtling through the hot humid air to streak down the tarnished, sullen face of Truskar. The reticent troll reached up and adjusted his cloak about his cracked horns. Try as he might, the raindrops still thwarted him, and what was worse, his great pole-axe was beginning to show signs of rust. Scowling, he slipped the blade as far as he could under his cloak.

"Whatever good that is," he grumbled.

"Wheeeeeee! Lookie! Look at the rain! Oooh! And look at the flowers! They're soooo pretty! Look! Look! That one's a liana! Do you know what that means?" Calla asked as she became a blur of green flying little spirals around Truskar's head pointing in random directions near simultaneously.

"It means letting you get your wings water-proofed in Bartertown was a bad thing? Or how about that we haven't seen a single carnivorous plant large enough to eat you yet?" Truskar replied.

"She's happy enough, why begrudge her that?" A muffled reply interspersed with crunching came from a small dwarven woman, quite dry under her oversized black winter-night cloak.

"I'd rather have had my axe water-proofed." Truskar regarded Aldra as she waved at him under the cloak. He twitched as a tremulous leaf above gave way and drenched him. "Passions! I hate this jungle! Nothing ever goes right in jungles!"

"Hmm," Kievan raised an eyebrow from his vantage point sitting on a large boulder, his dark eyes staring through Truskar.

Truskar tensed as his eyes riveted to Kievan's face. "See something?"

"Just jealous, Truskar!" Calla flew in front of his face and shook her finger at him. "Jealous 'cause you can't fly and see all the pretty flowers way up in the trees!"

"Ah, yes, little windling, Truskar is very jealous of your pretty flowers." Truskar stared around her to continue looking at Kievan. She crossed her arms and stuck out her tongue at him.

"Right about... now!" Kievan said, as a wicked grin spread across his face.

Truskar grabbed for his axe.

"Eeep!" Calla squeaked as a fat heavy raindrop slid off a leaf and knocked her squarely in the head sending her

sprawling face up in the mud next to Truskar.

Shaking his head, Truskar picked up the disheveled windling with one hand and shook her gently to get the mud and water off her. Calla seemed stuck half way between embarrassment and disbelief.

"Now what?" Rausic asked, sprinting out of the jungle with his troajin, Ijamma.

"Viscous raindrop got the windling," Aldra said, lifting up her hood to get a better view of the spectacle.

"Oh, is that all?" Rausic replied as Calla waived timidly still dangling from Truskar's hand. "So, what's the big deal? Calla likes playing in the mud, I see her do it all the time." He waved at her dismissively as his lips curled up into a good-natured grin under his tusks.

"The point *is*, one can never be too careful! It is of the utmost importance to be vigilant at all times." Kievan slid deftly off his rock landing next to his orkish companion. "Something *you* would know very *little* about. Where were you just now? Off by yourself tramping about the Servos with no one at your back?"

"Vigilance, smidgelence. Ijamma and I caught lunch. I was going to share, but now I feel a little different, *human*." Ijamma let out a low growl as she carted an unidentifiable bloodied carcass over to Rausic.

"Need some dry fire wood to cook that?" Aldra asked glancing away from her trail rations hungrily.

"No, I already know where to get some." Rausic's hand flew out towards Kievan's longbow. Kievan started and dodged. "So much for being vigilant, eh?" Rausic grinned.

"Excuse me for interrupting your little camping trip," Nilanna said, gliding over to the group from her spot at the base of Kievan's rock. "But I would greatly appreciate it if we moved on, we've dallied far too long here, and I *am* paying you for *tactile* results, after all. If you are so keen on making camp, may I at least suggest finding a decent place to do it at?" Her bright blue eyes locked with Truskar's.

"We'll go when I say we'll go." Truskar growled at her, getting to his feet and placing Calla on his shoulder. "I said we'd do the Passion-damned job, and we will, so mind yourself wanting to come along and be catered to!"

"I've asked for nothing from you, but that you do the job that I'm paying you to do. If you can't do that, then our business ends here." Nilanna said, her cold eyes on Truskar. "We had an agreement, so you let me know when you decide how honorable you really are." She turned on her heels and went back to her rock, leaving Truskar to contemplate how hard he'd have to hit her to make her regret her statement.

"Truskar," Kievan shot his friend a pointed look.

"To Death's Realm with it, Kievan! We needed work, and you found some. But I ain't got it in my mind to spend any more time or flowery words on that woman than I already



have, and I ain't, further, got it in my mind to stand here and let her insult my honor! She's the one who insisted on coming along to fetch only Vesandral-knows-what in this Passion forsaken land. 'Til she's straight with me, I don't trust her no more than that mad Passion and you'd do best to feel the same. You got me?"

"You're the boss," Kievan replied, his voice like ice, "but you be sure and remember that her ways aren't yours. You touch her and I'll lay you out, and not in anyway that befits an honorable troll."

"Ain't no good, that woman," Truskar muttered under his breath as Kievan walked back over towards Nilanna. Kievan and he had been comrades for years, been most everywhere across the face of Barsaive and all the way to Rugaria more than once. Bring along one elven woman, and the whole world falls apart. Truskar sneered at the torrents of rain and wrapped his cloak around him tighter. The sun was rising higher in the sky,

and though the location afforded them some degree of shelter, Truskar was loathe to admit that Nilanna had a valid point; this was no place to be spending the night. It had been almost three weeks since they had left Barter-town, and any sign of Nilanna's missing treasure was nowhere to be seen. Not that

Truskar really had the slightest notion of what it was that they were actually looking for.

"I'll know when we find it," she had said when he'd met her at the Iron Ox over a stout mug of ork brew. "It's of the utmost importance to my people that our mission is kept secret. Because of this fact, I'm afraid that I cannot disclose to you, at this time, the item that you are seeking." She cocked her head as if she were sizing him up.

"How's it you expect us to go and find you somethin' that you can't tell us what is, little lady?" He had frowned at her as he sloshed his pint.

Nilanna glanced over at Kievan. He nodded at her over his ale and she continued, "I am charged by my people to accompany you on your mission."

Truskar coughed as he tried not to spit his *hurlg* at her. "Scuse me?" he said.

"She's a Scout, Trus, ain't half-bad from what I hear." Kievan slid his eyes toward her.

"It ain't what I was fixin' for when I asked you to go find us some work in town. What's it you're trading for, miss?"

"Five gold per person, we'll be going into the Servos," she said without a moment's hesitation.

"Ain't said 'yes' yet, miss. I ain't the type to go riskin' my crew's lives for a bag of coin no matter the metal."

"I admire your dedication to your men, Truskar. I would be hesitant to give my business or trust my own safety to anyone who was not so hesitant. Ten gold per and I will tell you where in the Servos we will be going. The matter of secrecy is not because of safety but a matter of pride and reputation. I will not condescend to you by pretending that there

is not a great deal of peril to be had in journeying into this particular area of the Servos, although Kievan Ta'alus assures me that you are all well skilled in dealing with such matters, and his word is golden to me."

It wasn't like Truskar to go jaunting off into the depths of the Servos to find mystery treasures, but Kievan was convinced that it was a good offer. Damn, for that amount of

money, who wouldn't be. Over the years the one thing that Truskar had learned was that in matters of foresight and judgment, an Archer should never be dismissed. Now, staring out at the dank, wet jungle, he began to have his doubts.

"Finish up with yer carcass, there," Truskar gestured towards the feeble roasting pit Rausic had managed to kindle with Calla's help. "We're moving on soon as it's done."

"Bah, if it's that important, then it's done now!" Rausic sliced a chunk off the carcass still bleeding and started chewing on it. "Enough sitting around, let's go already!"

Nilanna wrinkled her nose at Kievan in consternation. "Don't look at me, I'm going to finish cooking mine," he said pulling out his knife to gingerly saw off a piece for himself.



"Everyone's afraid of a little blood! Like children! Here, let me do it!" Aldra plodded over, her cloak training helplessly behind rolling rocks across the ground as she went. Here, let me do it!" Aldra plodded over, her cloak training helplessly behind rolling rocks across the ground as she went.

Ijamma growled and clenched onto one of the leg bones before Aldra got to it to play tug of war with the spit poles. "Ya already got yours! Don't be greedy, you blasted feline!" Ijamma growled, knocked Rausic to the ground, and started chewing on his arm.

Nilanna gasped.

"Don't you worry none, they do that a lot." Kievan said as he tended to the fire.

Calla flitted over to sit on Nilanna's shoulder. "No good berries here, I'm really not looking forward to more rations." Aldra grunted her disapproval of the statement. "But Aldra! We've been eating rations for days and days and days..."

"I know that. There's nothing wrong with rations. However, that piece is mine." Aldra cocked her brows at the tiny winger as she finished liberating the last bone from its meaty prison. She gave a happy sigh of a job well done as she finished and slid her prized new bones into her knapsack.

Truskar's face was a mask of disapproval and business as he frowned at his colleagues' antics. In the corner of his eye, though, a smile glistened. Since he'd left his moot in the Peaks, aside from Kievan, they were the only good friends he'd made. Like family, they were to him.

Behind Kievan the foliage seemed to shift. Truskar strained his eyes; perhaps it was a trick of the light from the pit's fire. No. There it was again. There was no difference in temperature though. "Pro'lly just the wind," he frowned, *or loose vines or water dripping, or... damn jungle!* Uneasiness seemed to seep into him.

"Hurry it up, Kievan," he muttered as he walked over towards Aldra.

Kievan looked up at him abruptly and followed him with his eyes. He was all too familiar with that tone. Truskar tapped Aldra on the shoulder and silently pointed to the forest wall behind Kievan and Nilanna. Last thing Truskar wanted was Rausic and Ijamma running head first into only Vestrial-knows-what, or perhaps worse, running into nothing and complaining about it for the next six hours. Aldra stared intently at the foliage, scratched her head, and shrugged. Kievan slowly stood up and looked behind him, his hand slipping towards his bow so slowly as to be barely noticeable. His eyes scanned the perimeter of the clearing for any sign of movement.

"Aw, Kievan, watch what you're doing! You're burning it!" Calla wailed from her spot in front of the pan of meat. "Kievan!"

A loud growl erupted from the other side of the pit followed by Calla's startled scream. In an instant, Kievan had turned, his bow spinning with him into his hand where

a drawn arrow met it at the nocking point. *Behind Rausic, large, black, a barrage of legs.* He drew and fired. *Giant spider, shit!* He drew another arrow.

The spider writhed for a moment before turning its attention back to Rausic. Ijamma looked confused, took a step back, as Rausic charged it. His claws formed as he screamed a mixture of expletives and whoops of joy at the spider. Seeing Rausic running forward, Ijamma sprung into action as well, lunging for a hairy leg. In all his excitement, Rausic misjudged his swipe and dived to one side of the spider.

"Spider, Ork, Big Cat.... They never listen to me." Kievan muttered reaching for another arrow. "Let's just go and get between the Archer and the beastie— Kievan can just shoot around us!" He nocked the arrow as it erupted in flame, his eyes still on the spider.

Truskar moved towards the spider in an arc, building up altitude with each step, trying to keep out of Kievan's way. Pole-axe drawn, he crashed down on the spider with a cry of fury. Green phlegm oozed out of the spider's side as it stuttered to keep its balance. Truskar landed and swung his pole-axe across its back crushing in the spongy thorax and sending a spattering of goo across the jungle floor. The creature chittered and staggered backward. From behind, sticky webbing engulfed Truskar's axe; three more spiders had emerged dangling from the canopy.

Calla channeled magic through her tiny body and hurled two stones toward one of them. The stones transformed into two maces of ice linked by a frigid chain. One of the spiders became entangled and fell from its web, crashing down to the canopy floor in front of Aldra. The spider wriggled itself around enough to spit at her.

"Whoa!" she exclaimed, dodging out of the way. A wave of cold inky darkness emanated from her hand and the spider stopped struggling and began to convulse.

One of the remaining spiders spat a jet of venom at Nilanna, who had been standing behind Kievan watching with her eyes wide as she tried to nock her arrow on her short bow. She gasped as the sizzling froth landed on her arm, the acid scalding her before she collapsed onto Kievan.

"No fair fighting without me! I've been hankering for a good fight since breakfast!" Rausic roared as he got back to his feet.

"Wouldn't dream of it. Now go *hit* something this time!" Truskar said as he continued to struggle to free his axe.

Rausic ran towards the first spider that had taken a beating from Truskar as it tried to climb its way back up to the canopy, sans four legs. His sharp claws slashed their way through spider viscera. The black hairy mass oozed back onto the ground, barely recognizable as a spider. "You see that, Ijamma? I got me one!"

Aldra and Calla combined efforts to try to take down another spider. Kievan was busy trying to recover from being downed and accessing Nilanna's condition. The two remain-



ing dangling spiders focused their attention on Truskar as he still fought to reclaim his axe.

"Ijamma?" Rausic called out. "I got one, Ijamma." He scanned the clearing. "Ijamma?"

He reached out with his mind for his friend. A low whimper answered him. *Scared. Can't move.* He turned abruptly to see another spider behind him standing on top of a white cocoon. The cocoon twitched frantically while the spider calmly paused rolling the bundle in webbing and spat at it. Suddenly, the cocoon lay still and the spider began to try to pick it up to haul it into the canopy. Rausic growled and ran towards the spider slashing at it as it hoisted the cocoon into the air. *Pain. Confusion.* The spider chittered and continued to climb. The shouts behind Rausic faded away as he clawed at the spider desperately. *No. Disbelief.* He could feel Ijamma slipping away as he attacked. Rausic barely noticed when Truskar and the others joined him; his sole attention was directed at the spider somewhere between the two emotions of rage and terror. The spider dropped the cocoon after a frenzied gutting, and Rausic began to rip the webbing apart. *Sad. Quiet.* Somewhere behind him the battle continued on in droning voices and dampened shouts.

"I've got you, Ijamma. I've got you," Rausic said as he removed the webbing. Two hollow eyes stared back at him from the wispy gauze. *Cold.* Rausic rubbed at the webbing frantically. "It's okay now, it's okay you can move now. It's just the poison. It'll wear off. Here, it will all wear off in a minute." Magic flowed from Rausic towards Ijamma. It ran from his chest out to his arm, through his elbow, across his forearm, and down to his wrist. It fanned out across his fingers, slid down to the tips that touched Ijamma's face, and curled back to move up his arm along the path it had just traversed. "Ijamma," Rausic said her name slowly, picking his way through the syllables as his mind tried to crawl its way toward understanding. After a moment, he stood up and faced the one spider that remained, still taunting the group as it dangled from the canopy. With a guttural growl, he leapt towards the spider and raked his claws clean through the spongy spider flesh. The creature writhed for a moment spinning in its webbing before falling to the ground where, with his claws receded, Rausic fell to punching the remaining life out of the quivering, curled shell of a spider.

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"So, then Ijamma says to me, honest to *Mikbruug*, she says to me, 'why would you want to waste good hurlg on that?' Okay, well, she didn't say it exactly, but that was the look she gave me... or maybe it was indigestion. But anyway, next morning we wake up and Ijamma's wearing this pink dress and a big hat with a feather in it, and I think 'what in Death's Realm happened last night?' But then I see the ambassador in the corner..."

Aldra's boot sank into the mud with a sickening squish. Small puddles lined the path they walked. The Servos lie stretching quietly before them. Rain still dripped down from the upper canopy creating the only noise to be heard by

rustling the leaves. Behind her, Aldra could hear the prattling on of Rausic about Ijamma that had been his sole topic of conversation since they packed up camp.

"Gee, doesn't he ever give it a rest?" she asked Truskar as they walked.

"Let him be, it's his way of dealing with things."

"Can't believe they got Ijamma. She was a hunter to be sure, bright as they come... lucky for Rausic. You hear him talk about how she tracked down that noble's lost parrot all through Bartertown?"

"Is there a point to all this?" Truskar frowned.

Aldra thought for a moment, "I just thought that it was kind of odd... Did you catch it? During the battle she seemed to sort of hesit... Oof," Aldra grunted as she walked into Nilanna. "Why did we stop?" she looked around puzzled as they entered a large clearing.

Nilanna turned and placed her finger to her lips. Her bright blue eyes scanned canopy and open sky. Aldra and the others listened intently; they had come to expect the late afternoon sounds of nocturnal creatures awakening, yet the Servos remained silent.

"I don't hear anything," Rausic frowned after a moment. Nilanna rolled her eyes in exasperation at him. He blinked a few times at her, his eyes glazed over, before her meaning seeped in. "Oh," he said.

"Well, I'm still lost," Truskar said. "Would one of you nature-y types mind filling in the rest of us?"

"Shh!" Nilanna said, as a breeze began to pick up. The leaves in the upper canopy began to rustle, softly at first and then more frantically. A soft rhythmic gusting began to settle into the wind pattern accompanied by a soft whooshing sound.

"Oh, not good, not good, Truskar! Wind doesn't do that!" Calla said, her eyes widening by the second.

"Well, what the...?" Aldra began.

"Oh, great!" Kievan whispered, grabbing the two women and hauling them back into the tree line.

"Would somebody please mind tellin' me what in Death's Sea...?" Truskar began.

Kievan spun around and cupped his hand over Truskar's mouth. "Wy-vren," he mouthed.

All eyes remained transfixed on the canopy as the wind slowly died down.

"Do you think it saw us?" Calla asked in a muted voice looking hopeful.

"And just what is a wyvern doin' here? I thought they were only in the Liaj! Scout!?" Truskar turned towards Nilanna.

"There have been reports in the Servos..." she replied still watching the leaves settle.

"Ya ain't never said nothin' about no wyverns, mis-sy."

"Anyway, it seems to have moved on," she turned towards Truskar and began to back out of the tree line. "It seems to me, we ought to try to get as far out of its territory

as quickly as...”

There was a loud crash as the upper canopy exploded with movement. A dark scaly mass descended into the center of the clearing with alarming speed. Nilanna’s eyes gaped at Truskar wide in surprise as her gaze trailed down to her abdomen where the sharp edge of a tail spear protruded, its writhing spattering a mixture of black ooze and bile across her immaculately kept hide armor.

“Kievan...” she sputtered before she fell backward limply, further impaling herself on the spear.

“Nilanna! No!” Kievan screamed, his bow already drawn. A flurry of flaming arrows whizzed through the air finding repose within the scaly hide.

The wyvern uttered an air splitting screech as it dislodged Nilanna from its tail and rushed towards Kievan.

“Stupid *ujnort*! You don’t fight a *wyvern*!” Rausic growled, grabbing Kievan by the collar sending him stumbling back into the tree line in time to avoid a swipe of the foot long claws. Rausic grunted as a second round of razor sharp claw tips slid across his back. Kievan got to his feet in time to be dragged into the jungle by Rausic. Behind them, Truskar had already begun herding Calla and Aldra deeper into the jungle. From the clearing they could hear the wyvern screech again and then the leaves began to sweep past them as they ran. Calla nearly knocked herself out on several large hanging vines as the wind picked up again.

“It’s leaving?!” Aldra called out above the wind.

“Maybe it just wanted a quick snack?” Rausic said.

“We can’t just *leave* her back there! She could still be alive!” Kievan wrenched free of Rausic’s grasp and began to run back towards the clearing.

“Idiot! You’d think you were an ork with *gahad*!” Rausic said, running after Kievan. “That black ooze is poison! Even if she didn’t die from the hit, she’s dead now! Now, get back into the damn jungle!” He growled, lunging towards Kievan and grappling him.

There was a loud crash from deeper in the jungle followed by a high-pitched squeal. Kievan and Rausic stopped struggling with one another and followed their previous path into the jungle depths.

“Calla!” Kievan called out as he ran. “Truskar, what’s going on!?”

Dodging hanging vines and stumbling over bulbous tree roots they saw Truskar come into sight. He had traded his axe for a saber in one hand and had pulled out his fern-dask in the other.

Aldra stood behind him, blue strands quickly meshed together as her stubby fingers flew about deftly. As the path turned, they saw the cause of the sound. Somehow, the wyvern had managed to break its way through the upper branches and had wedged itself in front of the only traversable path. It still looked as ferocious as before despite having two charred arrow remnants embedded in its hide and less a limb, presumably more of Aldra’s handiwork than Truskar’s.





Calla had stumbled over to a stump and was in the middle of chugging down the contents of one of their vials.

Truskar caught sight of them as he blocked a claw swipe with his shield. "There y'are! We can't go this way! We'll have to go back! We might be able to make it through the clearing before it can climb back out!"

"Ain't gonna work!" Rausic scowled pulling out his mace as they closed the distance. "It's too damn fast! Gotta just kill it!"

"Ya, tried that. You forgot to mention that wyverns are hardy little buggers! At least it can't go through the jungle!" Truskar's blow glanced off the incoming wyvern claw.

"It can sure try! Still, it could still climb out and be out there waiting for us before we got half way there!"

"*Va!*" Truskar swore. "Can Kievan out run it?"

"Uh, maybe."

"Can you out run it?"

Snort. "No. Do I have 'pretty-boy-archer' written across my chest?"

"Try it anyway. Aldra and I have a plan; we'll keep it busy for a while— better some of us make it out then none at all. Kievan, take Calla and Rausic with you."

"I ain't running away from some ugly winged lizard!" Rausic said.

"You already did! It's not negotiable, they'll need you with them." Truskar took another swipe at the wyvern.

"Let's go, ork boy," Kievan said, helping Calla into his backpack. Rausic opened his mouth to protest, but only had time to take a quick breath before Kievan grabbed him by the arm and launched himself forward. Half dragging, half carrying his comrade, Kievan made for the clearing.

"Y'ain't runnin' fast enough," Rausic said through his panting.

"Fine then, just try to not fall on your ass!" Kievan called behind him as he sped up. His eyes darted through the jungle as he ran. *One, two, rotten log, three, four, five, jump the ditch, six, seven, eight, dodge the big tree, nine, ten, elev...* Kievan stumbled over something soft on the ground and barely managed to avoid pitching over head first with Rausic. *Passions! What in Barsaive was that? I don't remember there being something there.* Despite the strong urge to look back, Kievan remained locked to his destination. In a matter of what felt like seconds to Rausic, they had passed the tree line, made their way across the clearing, and re-entered the tree line on the other side. Kievan slowed to a stop, leaves flying in his wake. He glanced back at Rausic who was staring intently at his hand. "Something wrong?"

"How many fingers do you see?" Rausic said.

"Uh... five." Kievan stared at him.

"Five! Do they look any pointier? Any more wyvernish?"

"Um, no."

"What! No kidding!? What kind of messed up luck is that?!" Rausic scowled.

Kievan cocked an eyebrow at him. "Um, yeah. How

about we wait for Aldra and Truskar here. How large is a wyvern's territory?"

Rausic shrugged, staring towards the clearing. "If it keeps tryin' to eat us, we're still in it... Do you think I could get it to hit me again? I could really use some new claws!" he asked, his eyes wide with hope.

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"Do you think they're out yet?" Aldra said, beginning a new thread.

"Probably, if Kievan has anything to say about it." Truskar blocked a tail strike; the fernweave creaked under the force of the blow. "You about ready?"

"Been ready," she said.

Truskar turned fast, grabbed the small dwarven woman under his arm, and began running. Though far less gracefully than his friend, he charged through the sparse undergrowth. Aldra continued concentrating on her thread; she more or less ignored everything else. Behind them, they could hear branches being broken and the resounding cry of the wyvern close behind.

"I need that tree!" Aldra glanced up quickly and reached out towards it.

"Tree it is," Truskar gasped veering to the right.

Aldra's hand brushed the tree as a deep inky blackness began to billow around them. "Are you ready for this?" she said.

"I better be, 'cause I can't see a thing right now." Truskar blinked as the darkness enveloped him.

"Straight, straight, hard left, hard right, straight, jump... now. Left, a little more, go straight...." Behind them there was a loud crack and the wyvern screamed again. "Big tree," Aldra chuckled to herself. Before her, she could see the opening to the clearing come into sight. Her familiarity with the unnatural darkness rendered her sight unaffected by the billowy haze. Behind them the wyvern seemed to have stopped, confused by the spell. *We're going to make it!* As they neared the clearing, the mist began to recede to reveal another wyvern, which screeched at them in anticipation.

A dripping tail swung towards Truskar. "Bloody reptiles!" A stinging pain wracked his shoulder as the force of the blow sent him staggering. "Go!" he threw Aldra out of the way before landing hard on his right forearm. She stumbled to her feet only to look up into a large black eye.

"Wyvern! Hey you, big, stupid, and ugly! I give you the *buunda*!" Rausic screamed charging toward the beast from the other side of the clearing.

"You stupid ork! Get your furry ass back here!" Kievan followed him with Calla peering out of his sack; he stopped short when he saw the wyvern.

Rausic landed a clean blow across the wyvern's tail with his spiked mace before the creature ripped a long sharp claw through his chest sending him reeling backwards. It re-centered its gaze on Aldra who was helping Truskar get back to his feet while popping open a vial from her pack. From the opposite tree line, two lit arrows sizzled on their

way into its dry, scaly skin. Its gaze wavered towards Kievan for a moment and then turned back to Aldra and Truskar. A great battle-axe met the small head in mid-rotation causing the wyvern to pull back in surprise. Truskar stumbled back to lean against a tree to guzzle down the vial's contents while Aldra stood by him and began to weave the threads for another spell.

"Come're you overgrown lizard! I want new armor!" Rausic screamed as he got back to his feet and flung himself at the wyvern. As if in answer, the wyvern whipped its long tail around and stabbed him through the shoulder. The dark poison slid down his chest and seeped into the fresh bloody slashes. Throwing him aside, it turned again towards Truskar and Aldra. Stumbling, Truskar managed to maneuver himself high enough to crash down on the wyvern's neck splitting it all the way down to the soft meaty flesh beneath

ing Calla intently as she heated up some food to help ease that day's injuries. Rausic's cold body lay sprawled out at his feet; the ork had long since succumbed to the poison that pulsed through his veins.

"Not going to light him up?" Truskar said, leaning against a thick vine.

"Not 'til morning. I don't want to attract anymore trouble tonight," Kievan kept his gaze on Calla steady. "I'm not sure I can find what we were hired to get from this hidden elf temple...."

"I know you cared about her," Truskar said, frowning at his own sad attempt at what Kievan had explained to him once as "consolation."

"Of course, I suppose it hardly matters since there's no one left to pay us or even tell us what it is that we were supposed to get in the first place if we were to find our way there..."

"I'm... very sorry for you, my friend."

"Of course, it's possible that Queen Alachia herself might want it, if it was of significant worth..." Kievan babbled on, detachment scrawled across his face.

Truskar gave up and smacked him, "I said I was sorry, *va'a'uli*! What's *wrong* with you?"

Kievan reached out to prevent falling over and turned his head to stare through his friend. "I'm not mad at *you*. I told her I'd protect her with my life when we started out, and *I couldn't* do that. I've no reason to be mad at *you*. *You* were right; we shouldn't have let her come along in the first place. In fact, *I* shouldn't have involved any of you."

"*Va!* And what? You were going to go tramping around the Servos by yourself at the beck and call of your fair lady? They knew what they were getting into! No one expected it to be easy; life is dangerous!"

"Life with *you* is dangerous."

"Oh, I see. It's back to blaming me again, eh, Kievan? Then why don't you just leave? I never asked you to follow me around!"

"Follow you! As I recall, you decided to leave your moot when I was well enough to make my way back down that damned mountain of yours, oh, fearless *leader*!"

"What did you say, *va'a'uli*?" Truskar's fist connected with Kievan's chest.

Kievan let out a surprised gasp and then coughed up a trickle of blood. "Damn trolls," he looked at Truskar out of



the scaly hide. The tendons in the wyvern's neck snapped and it found raising its head out of Truskar's range impossible as he swung his axe around again and ended the creature's misery. Kievan was busily rubbing salve into Rausic's wounds with Calla's help as the ork lay still.

Truskar breathed heavily as he walked over to give a sound kick to the wyvern's remains. "Damn wyverns.... Wyverns?" He turned back towards the tree line in time to see Aldra spill her entrails onto the wet ground before falling forward. Behind her, the withered wyvern screamed its victory. Two lit arrows, a frozen mace, and the edge of a great axe pierced its skull and it crashed forward on top of its victim.

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Night rolled in early under the shade of the canopy. Truskar hobbled over to Kievan who sat on a log, watch-



## DECEPTION

DEX: 14 STR: 8 TOU: 10  
PER: 17 WIL: 14 CHA: 16

Initiative: 11/D10+D8  
Number of Attacks: 1  
Attack: 14/D20+D4  
Damage: 8/2D6  
Number of Spells: 6  
Spellcasting: 22/D20+D10+D8  
Effect: See Below

Physical Defense: 10  
Spell Defense: 20  
Social Defense: 16  
Physical Armor: 0  
Mystic Armor: 10  
Knockdown: 8/2D6  
Recovery Tests: 5

Unc. Rating: Immune  
Death Rating: 52 (82)  
Wound Threshold: 15

Combat Movement: 90  
Full Movement: 180

Karma Points: 30

Karma Step: 8/2D6

Powers: Empathy Net 20/D20+D8+D6, False Form 20/D20+D8+D6, False Sight 20/D20+D8+D6, Fear Immunity, Horror Durability (6/5) 1-5, Horror Mark 15/D20+D6, Spells: Illusionist (Fifth Circle), Thought Mirror 20/D20+D8+D6

Legend Points: 21,000 for destroying it; 7,000 for breaking the illusion  
Equipment: None  
Loot: 300 silver for an intact body

### Commentary

Deceptions are relatively new to Greater Bar-saive. Scholars are divided on whether the fierce attacks are committed by a group of Horrors or a single Named Horror. Working on the belief that a single new Named Horror is more frightful than a number of smaller Horrors, scholars have chosen to theorize that deceptions are closely related to the deceivers found in Parlainth. Deceptions use their great illusionary abilities to ensnare Name-givers in their web of deceit. Alternate theories posed by knowledgeable Wizards suggest that deceptions are actually deceivers who have developed a strong survival instinct, preferring to not engage in direct combat but rather to allow their illusions to do their dirty work for them. Their longer life spans reflect their greater prospect for cunning and devious schemes as well as the acquiring of new illusionary magic and stronger constitutions gained by greater experience in the world outside of Parlainth. Unlike their deceiver brothers, however, deceptions prefer to travel alone in order to solely reap the chaos that they sow. Deceptions enjoy eliciting emotions of despair, remorse, horror, and causing heroic name-givers to question their actions, much like their deceiver kin. It is highly common for a deception to choose a particularly strong knit group of adventurers or pray on small villages. Deceptions Horror Mark their victims and then use their talents to destroy the strong bond of trust between them, feeding off the emotions this causes.

Deceptions generally select their targets by using their Empathy Net power (see PxG 75, EGC 459-60 for nonstandard Horror Powers) to scan their minds to find appropriate prey. If chosen, targets are Horror Marked and lured into the deception's world of illusion created out of their own memories with the deception's False Form, Thought Mirror, and Illusionary spell abilities. Using these abilities, the deception endeavors to torment targets in various ways to elicit

the corner of his eye.

"You shouldn't have said that." Truskar stared off into the jungle.

"You should have hit me harder."

"I ain't takin' away your pain that easy, you suck it up and deal with it, *no 'a'g'ral*."

"Better figure out which I am, 'cause those two don't go together." Kievan spat up another round of blood.

There was an awkward silence until Calla returned with a bowl of her famous trail ration and random edible plant stew. "Always fighting, always yelling; both of you like two thundra beasts stamping around! Eat something while it's warm. Fighting won't help, not a bit! Think how Aldra, Nilanna, and Rausic would feel seeing the two of you!"

Kievan glanced down at the pale ork and tried in vain to stifle a laugh.

"It's not funny!" Calla stuck out her lower lip.

"What?" Truskar frowned at his bloodied companion, thinking he'd finally snapped outright.

"No. It's just... Well, I think if he were here, I think Rausic would have joined us! You know, like a thundra beast!" Kievan made pawing motions with his arms. "All those horrible artisan tests... 'So, guess what I am? Hey, c'mon guys, I'm a thundra beast! See! A thundra beast!'"

Truskar's mouth turned up at the corners ever so slightly, "Piss poor excuse for a thundra beast, and an actor for that matter! Would have thought that the boy had never been to Cara Fahd, let alone grown up there!"

"Lucky for him, the acting was so damn bad that no one could accuse him of being Horror marked! It was just too funny to watch!" Kievan sobered up and looked back at Rausic. "You know, he said some damn weird things after he was hit by that wyvern, while we were waiting for you... and Aldra."

"I don't doubt it. Poison will do odd things to you."

"I suppose," Kievan looked unconvinced, "it was before the poison though. It seemed like he thought that something was wrong."

"Rausic *thinking*?" Truskar looked troubled, "You sure you weren't hearing things?" He regarded Kievan for a moment, took a spoonful of stew, and held it out to him. "I think you might need some of this, too. Eat up, tomorrow we find the River and catch what manner of vessel we can to get out of this Passion forsaken dump."

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*It's all too odd. Nothing's felt right since we left Bartertown. Even in the Blood Wood, we weren't attacked as quickly or ferociously as we have been here. Not even skirting the Poison Forest. Something in the rain, or about the way the leaves blow. Or maybe the humidity? Damn it! What is it?* Kievan stared out at the still and silent lush of the jungle, nearly pitch now under the tallest trees that brooded overhead. He listened as a soft gale meandered through the paths and rustled the dried leaves. The rustling of leaves always had an effect on him; it was calming, and his bow held

at the ready started to tip slightly in his hand. The dankness of the air was almost enough to stifle the sweet bouquet of the Servos' night blooming flowers; almost, but not quite. Kievan smiled, staring deep into the wall of hanging vines he had been watching. The delicate smell of paper thin blooms, a starlit sky reflecting on calm waters leading off to the horizon, beyond Barsaive, beyond the Isle of Thera, beyond the veil of time itself. The lingering scent of a thousand wildflowers, the soft melodic voice, the curve of perfect lips, the beauty of the girl as she wrapped his wounds from his first hunt with fresh salve. Kievan's hand slipped instinctively to his side where the old wound still remained hidden under the folds of cotton and hide. The way her blue eyes sparkled, the way her face was all kindness... her face! Kievan startled as he realized what had drawn him to trust Nilanna so deeply.

A high-pitched squeal met his ears and he turned his gaze back towards camp as Truskar flinched out of sleep and tightened his grip on his axe. Something was moving across the dark backdrop of the jungle.

"Did you see it?" Truskar asked Calla, who had evidently hid under Truskar's cape not moments ago.

"It's very, very big! And it's got big teeth!" she said poking her head out to look around.

"Windlings!" Kievan let out a sigh. "Teeth bigger than you?"

A sudden movement from the above branches abruptly redirected Kievan's attention. A large, dark form jumped down from the treetops towards Truskar and Calla with a silent grace that struck a chord in the back of Kievan's mind. He followed the arc of the creature marking his target as Truskar was knocked to the ground under the weight of the beast. Grunting, Truskar managed to push the creature off him. It let out a deep guttural snarl and snapped its teeth at Truskar's arm before turning. Calla, bruised from Truskar's sudden fall, flitted towards Kievan, with the beast in close pursuit.

Kievan blinked as they approached him. *Can't be... It doesn't make any sense!* His arrow lit. In the dim wavering of the firelight, he found that he had been right in recognizing the snarl. *A wood lion?!* The bowstring sang.

"Kievan?!" Calla cried out wide-eyed.

"I've got it!" Kievan nocked, lit, and fired another arrow; the wood lion veered directly into the shot, but not before closing its powerful jaws around Calla's small body. It shook it's massive head and clawed it's way up a nearby tree. Barely dodging the swing of Truskar's axe, it disappeared from view.

"Kievan?! Was that a..."

"I damn sure thought so," Kievan said scanning the branches with an arrow as a torch.

"But that's *impossible!* Wood lions don't live in the *Servos*, they live in the *Blood Wood!*" Truskar looked for a heat signature up the tree the wood lion had climbed. A faint crackling to his left caught his ear and he took a cautious step toward it. The crackle repeated and Truskar readied his axe,

## Deception (Continued)

the emotions on which it feeds. The emotions provoked are widely varied, but all are distinctly unsettling to the victims in some way. Many adventurers who have encountered deceptions and lived, have sworn off any sort of heroics out of sheer self doubt and fear and remain in a state of self loathing and disbelief in the enormity of their own failure.

Deceptions retain a physical attack as a vestige of their time in Parlainth, but rarely bother to use physical attacks unless absolutely necessary; this also eliminates their need to rely on using Damage Shift in combat as their deceiver kin often do. Many other powers that are intrinsic to the make up of deceivers have been cast aside by deceptions in their desire to pursue the destructive art of illusion and manipulation single-mindedly. Because of their deceptive natures, much remains unknown about deceptions including the exact nature of their one residual attack. Deceptions have never been seen in their actual forms, though they often manifest in the form of a fellow Name-giver. Deceptions may choose to embody a specific race, Discipline, and sex. While very clever, unless the deception is particularly powerful and experienced, it is limited to mixing memories gleaned from its victims with its Empathy Net ability rather than creating anything truly new and unique. Characters may notice a certain degree of incongruity in the illusions presented to them due to the deceptions only passing familiarity of this netherplane. Due to the lack of knowledge surrounding deceptions, GMs should feel free to change stats and powers as they see fit.

Astute adventurers who notice disparities in the illusions created by deceptions and are able to break the illusions or choose not to act in a manner desirable to the deception may find themselves abandoned by the Horror in its search for more easily manipulated prey. Deceptions often enjoy watching the fall out that is perpetuated in reaction to their illusions. After witnessing the illusion of a certain Horror Stalker making a deal with a Horror to kill the local political leader, the Ravensteel Adventuring Party reported that they did witness some details that did not add up as they might expect, though they remained sure that the Horror Stalker they killed was indeed guilty. Later evidence brought up at their trial for manslaughter clearly placed the Horror Stalker at a local tavern at that time looking for information on a particularly crafty Horror he had managed to track into town. Since so little is known about deceptions, GMs should feel free to adjust stats as they deem necessary.



## DECEPTOR

Named Horror

DEX: 16 STR: 10 TOU: 15  
PER: 23 WIL: 25 CHA: 22

Initiative: 20/D20+D8+D6  
Number of Attacks: (1)  
Attack: 17/D20+D10  
Damage: 16/D20+D8  
Number of Spells: 5  
Spellcasting: 30/D20+D10  
+D8+2D6

Effect: See Below

Unc. Rating: Immune  
Death Rating: 71 (179)  
Wound Threshold: 21

Karma Points: 60

Physical Defense: 21  
Spell Defense: 29  
Social Defense: 28  
Physical Armor: 5  
Mystic Armor: 20  
Knockdown: 6/D10  
Recovery Tests: 7

Combat Movement: 90  
Full Movement: 180

Karma Step: 15/D20+D6

Powers: Empathy Net 25/D20+D10+D8+D4, False Form 26/D20+D10+D8+D6, False Sight 24/D20+D12+D10, Fear Immunity, Horror Durability (6/5) 18, Horror Mark 24/D20+D12+D10, Spells: Illusionist (Seventh Circle), Thought Mirror 24/D20+D12+D10

Legend Points: 270,000 for destroying it; 90,000 for breaking the illusion

Equipment: None  
Loot: None

### Commentary:

Of the many Horrors that still plague Barsaive, Deceptor is in many ways the most nefarious. Preferring to keep his goals to himself, he weaves a web of confusion across the land. He has somehow managed to achieve some measure of control over the actions of deceptions. Following his prodding, deceptions seem to cause random chaos and provoke sometimes even trivial reactions in Name-givers for unfathomable reasons. While scholars are generally at a loss as to what his ultimate goal is, they remain certain that his plans are more coherent than they can fathom. The culmination of what they deem to be minor parts in his large plan for Barsaive have had shocking consequences and are not generally spoken of publicly in an effort to both retain calm among the populace and to better keep what little has been discovered about him from his own ears. Deceptor is thought to be a master of Name-giver psychology, having an innate sense of what will provoke the emotions and reactions that he desires. Some accounts suggest that he is the one responsible for luring deceivers out of Parlathin and making them into the new deceptions that exist in Barsaive today. Others suggest that he may be working with one or more of the mad Passions toward some unknown cause. Still others believe that he occasionally masquerades as other Named Horrors to cloak his actions from attentive scholars. Scholars hope that he will be forced out of this world by a drop in the magic level before his plans come to fruition. Finally, some scholars believe that their brethren are simply paranoid and that such a Named Horror does not exist. They view any talk from those who report encountering Deceptor as simply the ravings of madmen.

While deceptions lurk about Barsaive awaiting instructions, Deceptor must occasionally set his plans aside to feed. Occasionally, this goal results in the destruction of whole parties of adventurers save one or two who are kept alive to feed Deceptor until they either forgive their own actions or go mad with grief. Those who go mad are most favored, as they provide a more emotionally tasty meal. GM's should feel free to adjust Deceptor's powers and stats as they deem appropriate.

moving ever closer. From behind him, Kievan nocked his arrow and shot it out as a flare to illuminate the area. As suddenly as the crackling had begun, it stopped. Truskar paused and, removing the arrow from its lodged location, he waved it about in that direction revealing little more than vines and a few tree stumps.

"Damned Servos! I thought I heard something over here. Did you hear it? Kievan?" Truskar turned toward his friend as the wood lion leapt towards the Archer from above. It knocked Kievan down before he had time to react and sent his bow skittering across the ground. It worked its claws deep through Kievan's armor and into the tender flesh beneath. Shuddering while trying to lift the lion off, Kievan locked eyes with Truskar as he charged with his axe raised high. Kievan opened his mouth to cry out as Truskar threw all his weight into a down strike. The axe fell with a sharp, sickening crack, embedding itself into the skull of the lion. The lion turned shakily towards Truskar with a questioning look upon its face and fur coat soaked in blood. Slowly, the lion regained its balance and the edges of its blood soaked jowls seemed to turn up into a mocking grin. As Truskar watched, Kievan's body slowly melted away into the ground as the lion shuddered and fell over where Kievan had been standing not moments before. Before his eyes the lion swirled and reformed.

"Passions..." Truskar whispered, taking a step back. The shaft of his axe fell from his hand and clattered to the ground.

Kneeling before him was his closest friend, his bow still in his hand, a lit arrow clutched between his fore and index finger. Kievan's eyes stared blankly into Truskar's from underneath a bloody axe blade.

"Kievan... my friend," he turned to avert his eyes as the Servos swirled before him. The darkness of night faded and vines gave way to pine and elm. As he turned, his eyes grew wider in horror. Two trees away Calla hung suspended, draped over two arrows, and pinned to a trunk, her glimmering wings reduced to char. Down the path, Rausic lay, his torso two feet away from the rest of him, his body half turned in an awkward manner across the ground with two arrows through him. A yard from him, a dark black, winternight cloak billowed, soaked in blood, around what still remained of a mangled form the size of a small dwarven woman. Two yards from her lay the remains of Ijamma, claw marks slit through the soft underbelly, entrails covered in dirt and pulled out as though they had caught on something moving through the forest. The only one that remained unaccounted for was Nilanna.

"Passions! I knew she wasn't right...." Bile welled up into Truskar's throat as his legs failed him and he dropped to the ground. "Mynbruje forgive me," he whispered, staring at the dirt path he sat on. From all his years traveling with Kievan, it was obvious to him by now that this was soil of a composition to be found directly outside the city limits of Bartertown.

# DOES YOUR TALE NEED TO BE TOLD?

The Earthdawn Publishing Trust is looking for Name-givers to contribute to the Earthdawn fanzine, The Book of Tomorrow. The Book of Tomorrow fanzine is built on articles contributed by fans around the world. In order to produce this fanzine, EDPT needs articles to put in it.

If you have a story, legend, adventure, Horror, creature, thread item, or anything else related to Earthdawn, send in a submission and we'll find a place for it in the fanzine. It doesn't matter how small or insignificant it may appear, we all know the greatest legends started off as young Name-givers.

If you wish to contribute to the Book of Tomorrow, see the submission guidelines at the end of this fanzine.



Visit <http://www.edpt.org> to download previous Book of Tomorrow volumes.



# REVELATIONS OF A SEVERED HEAD

by Kevin Hallock

Gilloc broods at his desk; his sunken eyes staring at nothing. The sweat beading on his forehead runs down his face soaking his short beard, and the blood of his family covers the front of his clothes. The noise outside grows louder as Rudro's followers reach Gilloc's office door.

"How had this happened?" repeats in Gilloc's mind. He was a better ruler than the bitch he replaced. Gedge had been a tyrant, but once Gilloc found the book and became an adept, he conducted fewer sacrifices and normally used the weak, sick, and criminal. He became an adept to free the kaer from Gedge's grip, at least that's what he told everybody. Becoming an adept is glorious and who really cares if a few mundanes had to die for it to happen. That's how all adepts are made. At some time in their past, the ancestors of "natural" adepts performed the necessary blood rites. Their magic is evidence of their family's crimes. Tears form in his eyes when he remembers his own family; he can't get the images of their broken and bloodied bodies out of his head. His own guards had murdered his family while they were eating dinner. Bastards! And now led by Rudro, those same guards are bashing down his door.

How did Rudro find a copy of *Becoming an Adept*? Gilloc had destroyed Gedge's book after killing her. Rudro is big and strong, but Gilloc didn't believe she was intelligent enough to read, let alone figure out the complex rituals. Had somebody helped her?

Gilloc is brought out of his pensive anguish when the last barrier protecting him breaks open. Rudro's followers rush in, but Gilloc only half-heartedly resists; he knows what's coming and part of him welcomes death.

"What is the point of living without my family?"

The crowd beats him with their hands, feet, and wooden clubs for several minutes, jeering and insulting him as he lies on the ground. Eventually, a former bodyguard raises a long sword, Gilloc mumbles, "Thank the Passions ...", and the swordsman hacks at Gilloc's neck several times.

"Finally, it's finished," Gilloc thinks. "The decapitation wasn't that bad ... wait a second, this is bizarre ... I'm still thinking. They're tossing my head around, but I never thought I'd remain conscious. I wonder if my sacrifices were conscious after their dismemberment? How long will this last? Or maybe this is part of being an adept?"

A deep, scratchy voice interjects, "You fool. Your kind are so stupid."

"Huh?" wonders Gilloc.

"And before you think about it, you're not delusional," the voice responds. "I'm real and you're dying, but we have a few minutes before your mind stops working. Frankly, this is one of my favorite parts," the voice gleefully adds. "I spend so much time hiding and have so few chances to share my joy. And I did like your work; you're certainly the best in recent history. Imerum was better though; people like that are so rare. Ini was also very good, but those are the only two better than you."

Gilloc becomes puzzled as a guard sets Gilloc's head on the desk. Imerum was one of the original discoverers of the book and Ini died thirty years ago.

The voice startles Gilloc by responding, "That's right, I've been here for a very long time. Imerum wasn't the first one I touched, but he was so good at satiating me, I gave him the most power."

"Satiating you?" Gilloc inquires, "But, Imerum was gifted by the Passions and helped free us from Theran tyranny; those dwarven scum deserved to die. The Blessed Twenty-One were each granted a copy of *Becoming an Adept* so that mundanes wouldn't be at the mercy of..."

A loud laughing interrupts Gilloc's recitation of the kaer's early history. "I know the story you were told ... because I wrote it. The Passions didn't give them the books; I did. I chose this kaer because Therans were in charge, but it only had a few adepts so it'd be a fun place for me to play. Normally, I just promise personal power; this was the first time I'd used freedom as a motivation. That false hope made this experience more delicious than anything I can remember."

Stunned, the only thought Gilloc can muster is, "What?!"

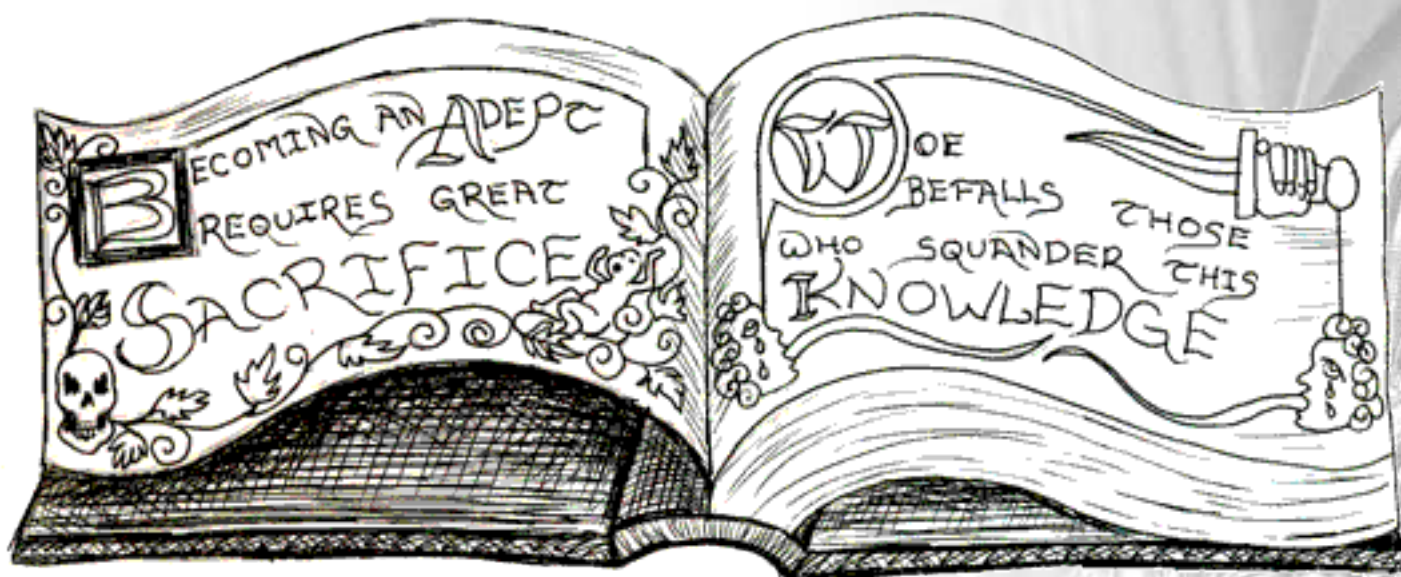
The voice gasps in mocking exasperation, "You still don't get it? I'm what you refer to as a Horror. Quulun is my Name."

"A Horror? Inside our magical barriers?"

"Yes, I was able to penetrate your 'powerful' wards." Quulun sarcastically responds.

"How?" Gilloc blurts.

"By entering before they were activated. The founders were so worried about other threats they didn't even notice my arrival. The kaer was sealed and the fun began. I had to get rid of the adepts because eventually they would have found me, so I was initially very careful. It took almost two decades, but I finally found ... oh, what's his name ... I can't remember. He was dumber



than a cadaver man and power hungry, essentially perfect for me. He was Imerum's friend and once I got Imerum a copy of the book; the adepts were as good as dead. Imerum was dedicated to 'the cause' and very persuasive. The Therans needed to be destroyed, no matter the price. You know that the Blessed Twenty-One were successful, but what you don't know is that it took me seven years to create them. Imerum carefully recruited each of them and often required a child or two as payment for a copy of the book. The Therans didn't notice a few more slave children dying because they barely fed their slaves anyways. The Twenty-One secretly gave birth to and sacrificed their own children to minimize suspicion. What a wonderful time!"

Giloc gasps, "Babies! The book states that children should be at least six before they're used."

"I know; I added that part to your copy. I sensed you wouldn't be as excited about killing babies as some of the others. If you idiots had bothered reading more than one copy of the book, you'd have noticed that each book was different. People are so easy to convince if you tell them exactly what they want to hear. Your rage against your parents and siblings was impressive, so I added a section about how familial Patterns make good candidates for the rituals. Your brutalization of your own sister is something I'll relish for centuries."

One of the rebels picks up Giloc's head and yells at it, but Giloc no longer cares about the outside world. He's remembering what he did to his sister. He'd made her suffer for what she'd done and he'd enjoyed every minute.

"See, that's why I gave you a copy. Like all mundanes, you wanted to be an adept and you had a gift for nursing rage and venting it on others. At the time, I didn't know how good you would become, but lately, your anger has lessened. I really hoped you'd use your own offspring."

Giloc shudders at the thought, "My children? My parents and siblings deserved what they got, but I'd never

do that to my wife and children."

"And that's why I decided to replace you. I really wanted some more familial torture and you weren't going to provide it. Rudro murdered her own children and husband, but she used poison. She doesn't have much stomach for blood, but she's served her purpose," explains Quulun.

"But, I thought the death of her family was an accident. All you wanted her to do was kill me?" asks Giloc, as the guards once again throw his head around in celebration.

"That's it. I've touched another, but he's not quite ready and I was worried the first move against you would fail, so I wanted to use somebody disposable. Rudro will only live another year and then, if everything goes well, Vedri will take over."

"Vedri? So that's why his new wife was found beaten to death! Nobody suspected him because they seemed to be in love."

"Truth be told, he loved her very much, but he wanted to be an adept even more, which I like in a candidate. He shows good potential ...."

The voice fades as the last of the blood drains out of Giloc's head. With his last thought, Giloc considers what he would do if he had Rudro in his grasp. If Giloc had lived a little longer, he'd have heard Quulun remark, "Now that's what I loved about you."

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Rudro holds Giloc's head in her right hand, staring at his face, and gives orders to her followers to destroy Giloc's copy of *Becoming an Adept*; she has no intention of letting someone else attain adepthood. As she studies Giloc's face, he eerily grins through his blood-soaked beard. Momentarily unnerved, Rudro quickly remembers that Giloc is dead, his book is burning, and now, she has nothing to fear.



# NESTECH'AL'S PLANTATION

by Oren Shochat

*This document is part of a bigger work called the "Lochostr project." Its purpose is to monitor slavery, an evil phenomena that sadly is still widespread in our beloved Barsaive. The author of this document, a former ork slave, has agreed to share his insight on one of the less known regions of our continent, the Servos Jungle. The writer's clear mind and sharp memory distinguished him enough to merit an entire chapter detailing the K'tenshin Servos settlement called, NesTech'al's Plantation.*

—Humbly presented for the edification of the reader by Thom Edrull, archivist and scribe of the Hall of Records, 1508 TH



## Crocboy Stormfist's Story

My name is Crocboy Stormfist and though to some people one's name may seem trivial, to me it is source of pride. Mother called me Theorg, but once our master sold her, no one cared to call me by it. I was simply known as, "Boy," "Come here," or "You". At puberty I was sold to house Carinci and was brought into Barsaive by a flying ship that landed on the Sixteen Towers of Aropagoi K'tenshin, House of the Nine Diamonds. I spent three months on the docks loading and unloading K'tenshin boats that came from all over the Serpent River to trade freight for gold jingles.

At the age of thirteen, my master marched me into the Abanos market. After only three minutes on the slab a greasy human, captain of a slave galley, bought me for 88 silvers. Human vessels lack the engine power of a true t'skrang river fairing boat. The captain's crew strapped my colleagues and I (if fellow slaves can be

called colleagues) to the benches, and we rowed our muscles stiff through the entire trip up the Servos River. We were not told our destination, because no one ever bothers to keep his mules informed. I was leashed to a rowing bench beside a human girl who had made the trip up the Servos River several times.

"You're the new fodder to NesTech'al's Plantation," she said when the overseer wasn't watching.

"Never heard of it," I said.

"Oh, it's pretty famous as these K'tenshin plantations go. I've been there a couple of times. The captain buys slaves there." An angry red and sickly green scab crawled up her left arm to her face. When she wasn't speaking, she scratched her arm and face against the oar like a bug-infected dog. I couldn't decide what I loathed more.

"What's it like? I mean for a slave."

"Let's just say I'd rather serve in Raggok's

realm,” she said and then spat on the floor.

“Thanks for trying to cheer me up.”

“Sorry mate, but your only chance to last more than a year in NesTech’al’s is to escape. Staying is death.”

“Has anyone ever escaped?”

“Anar, over there.” She pointed at the bareback of a human youth, two benches ahead. “Hitchhiked all the way to the Serpent hidden inside the cargo hold. Poor bastard, made it almost all the way to Urupa, but was caught in a Theran slaving raid.”

“Seems like an awful lot of trouble, to send him back.” I said.

“Yep, the captain got paid extra for bringing him along. Seems like the plantation trade-master took it personally when he escaped.”

“Trade-master? Who’s he?”

dock, our pilot made a wide detour around the bow of a sunken riverboat barely visible above the soft waves. It was a mute reminder of just how treacherous the Servos water could be.

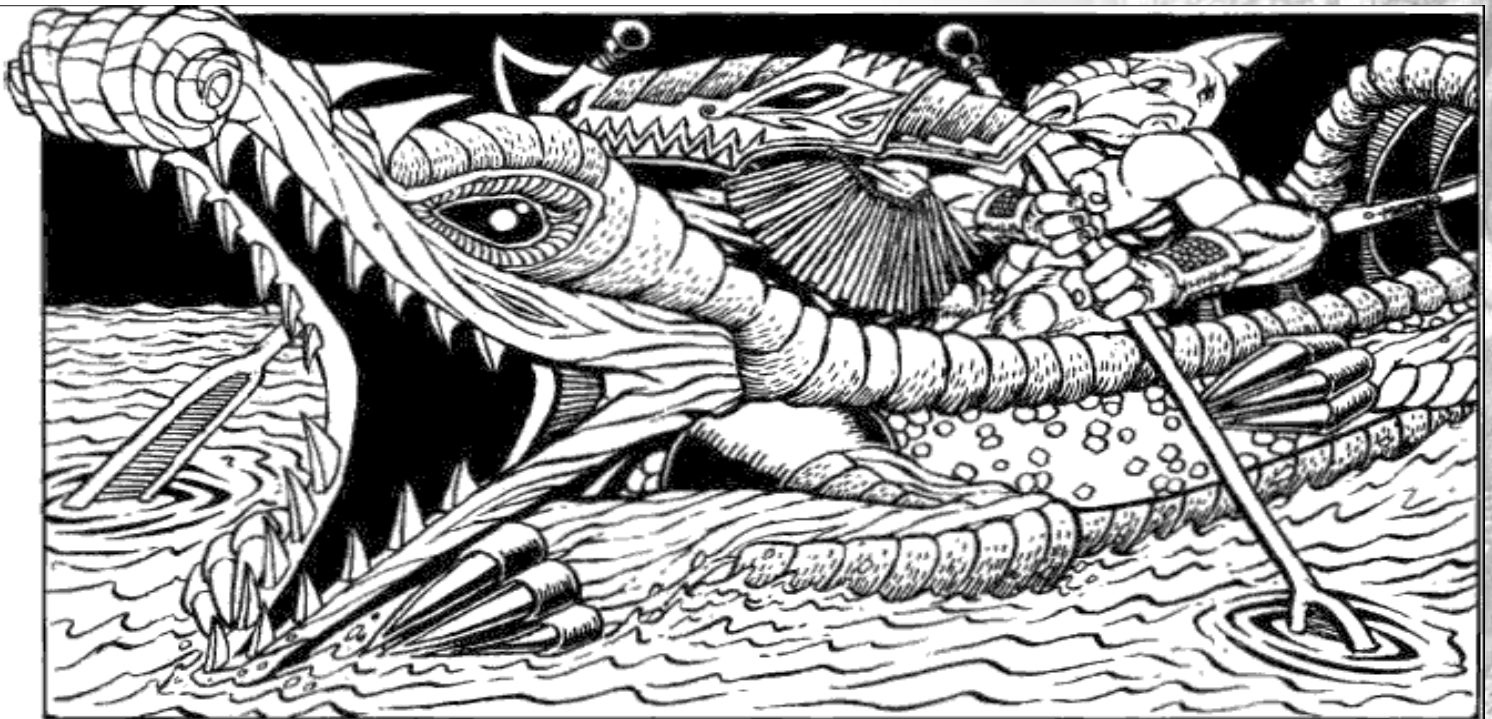
“That’s a pirate boat,” my talkative bench mate said.

“Pirates? On the river?” I said.

“That was Captain Black Eel’s boat. That’ll be the end of anyone who steps on NesTech’al K’tenshin’s tail.”

“I thought you said this place is called NesTech’al’s Plantation?”

“It’s his plantation, he can call it anything he wants.” She said. “NesTech’al, he’s the toughest lizard ever to swim these waters, mind you. Don’t ever try to mess with him or you’ll end up like poor Black Eel, Raggok take his black soul.” She started scratching her



“Seley K’tenshin. You’ll get to know him alright, though you’ll wish you hadn’t.”

Having seen both magnificent Thera and the K’tenshin’s house, I wasn’t much impressed at the site that greeted us when we reached NesTech’al’s. Without a good pilot to handle his boat, a man could go right past the plantation without ever knowing it was there. The plantation lay near the waterline but trees obscured most of its buildings. A black dock, constructed out of sago trees and heavy rope, was the only sign a Name-giver settlement existed. Several brown-skinned slaves and a few green-scaled t’skrang attacked it with hammers, nails, and crude boards, fixing some parts that washed into the current. When we approached the

arm so hard, I thought she would bore a hole through it.

“I’ll keep that in mind.” I said, trying to inch as far away from her as the chains allowed.

“Can you keep a secret?” She leaned closer, oblivious to my disgust.

“Well...”

“There’s a treasure down there.”

“Inside the boat?”

“Where else, idiot? Of course inside the boat, bloody Raggok’s whip!” This time she spat on the floor twice before continuing. “Black Eel was a pirate; there’s a fortune under the Servos waiting for a smart woman like me. One day, I’ll come up here with a cou-



ple of buddies and we'll fish it all out of the water."

"Sounds interesting." I was too tired to point out the obvious holes in her logic.

"Are you patronizing me?"

"By Raggok, I'm not!"

"It ain't polite to speak the name of a mad passion without spitting." She turned her head, disgusted.

As our galley approached the dock, we saw several t'skrang youngsters in the shallow water wearing no clothes, standing immobile like small statues. They held long spears poised above their heads. There was a cry of joy when one of them plunged his spear beneath the river bringing it out a second later with a wiggling red creature impaled on the point.

"Bloody t'skrangs, crazy for fishes," my bench neighbor said. "If it has fins and scales, they'll stick it on the end of a fork."

"I've never seen a fish so red."

"That's Servos k'sathra; never go into warm water around here. I once saw a bunch of them jump a thundra bull. I don't think I counted to five before it was nothing but a white skeleton."

"They don't mind being in the water."

"They aren't your everyday lizardmen! You're

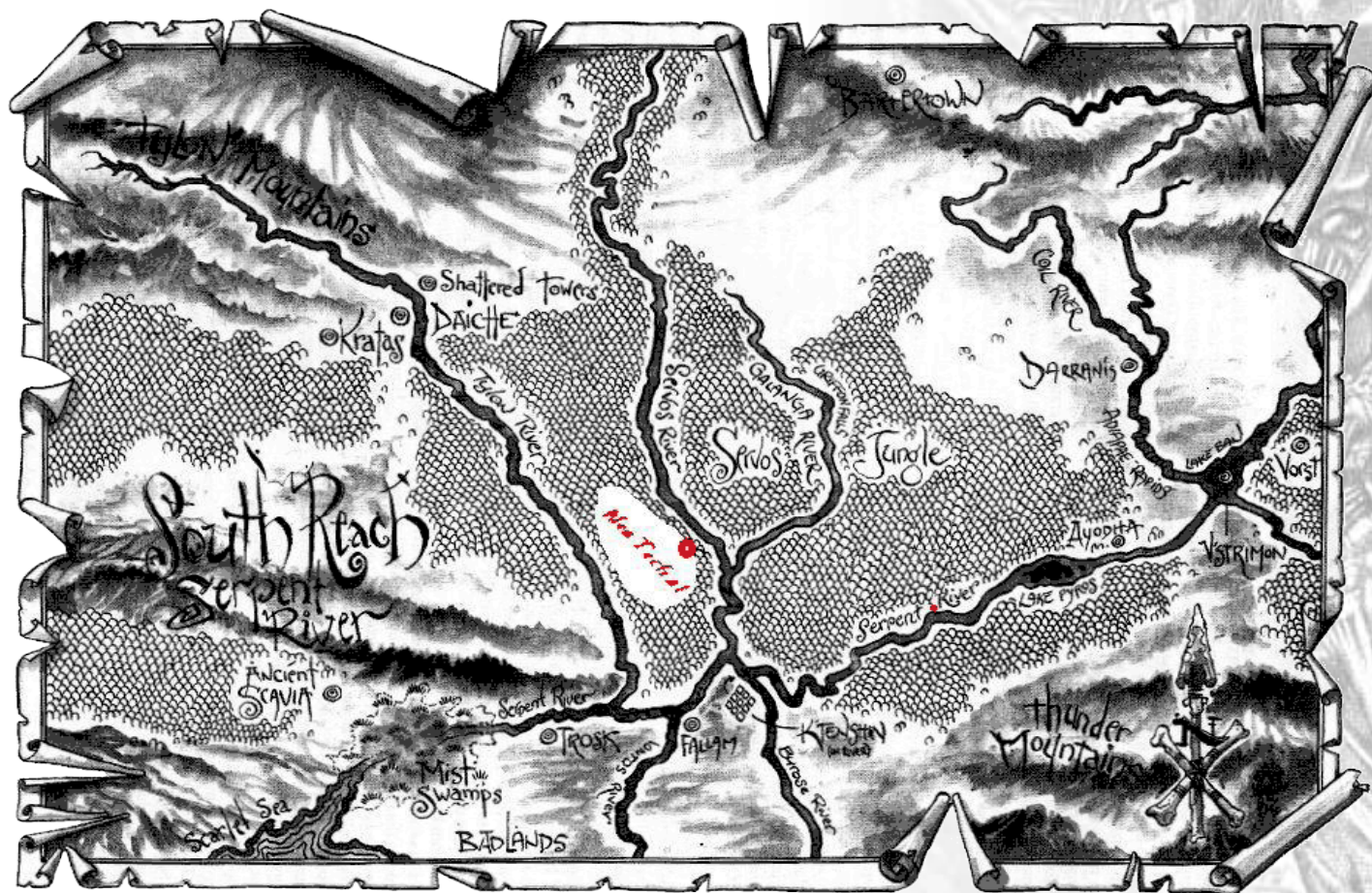
looking at genuine wild Servos lizards. The fish can't catch them. They are like ghosts in the water, the fishes can't smell them and can't see them. Don't you even dream of going like that into the river though; if the k'sathra don't get you then the giant crocs will. I tell you, some of them grinning monsters here grow to the size of dragons."

### GAME INFORMATION(For GM Eyes Only)

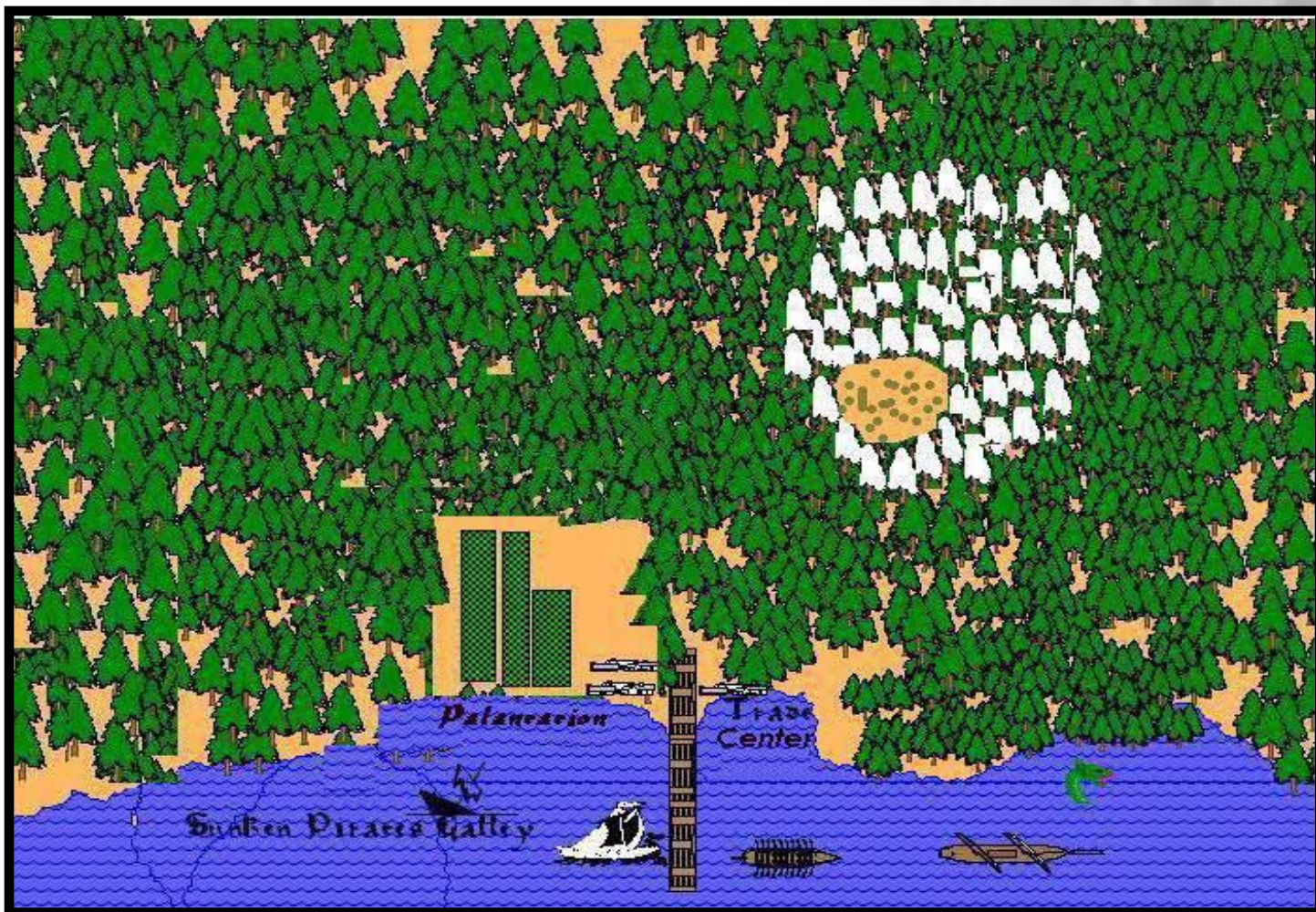
NesTech'al's plantation lies thirty miles to the northwest of the Galanga junction (the point where the Galanga River joins the Servos River). It is named after its founder and master NesTech'al Tiley Anier K'tenshin, a living legend in the House of the Nine Diamonds.

The only form of transportation is by boat or airship. A trek through the jungle is practically impossible. The only regular transportation is a K'tenshin supply boat that visits the plantation once a month.

The Plantation lies at the northerly bend of one of the numerous channels that crisscross the Servos and feed the everflowing Servos River. River pilots call it Channel S76 and consider it an easy passageway since it is pretty broad (over 200 hundred yards wide in several places). It starts near the plantation and ends in







the Servos River a little north of the Galanga junction. Warm underground currents from the volcanic hills above the plantation feed it and keep it quite deep year around. It can even accommodate deep-keeled boats during the dry season.

The area surrounding the plantation is unique in that it survived the entire Scourge intact. Some of the giant trees here are hundreds of years old. Astral space is particularly clean. An active volcano lies to the north of the plantation and feeds underground hot springs with True earth and fire. The springs in turn feed underground currents that spread the True elements all over the area. This relatively Horror-free, Elemental-rich haven in the jungle is home to unique flora, like the grove of white y'aikara trees, a rare form of True wood.

The reason this portion of the Servos has remained untainted by Horrors is because of a unique, intelligent creature the natives call El-Duro, who laired in the area for several centuries. For some reason this huge creature hunts any Horror or Horror Construct entering his domain (approximately a 30 mile radius around his lair). Although a sentient creature, torment-

ing El-Duro doesn't provide the Horrors with any nourishment. With much to lose and nothing to gain, powerful Horrors kept, and still keep, a respectful distance from this area of the Servos. So as the rest of the jungle was dying, the area of NesTech'al's plantation remained relatively clean of Horror influence, during and after the Scourge. (More information on El-Duro, will be given in upcoming fanzines). In game terms, the region is "Safe" (see Optional Raw Magic Rules, —MMS 40-42). Also the chances of a PC encountering Horrors during their stay at NesTech'al's plantation are slim.

A successful tribe of wild t'skrang has lived in the area for decades. The Gibar Snakes tribe is on good terms with the NesTech'al plantation. As a rule house K'tenshin hunts down wild t'skrang and enslaves them, but NesTech'al decided to take a different tact. He reasoned that raiding one of the biggest Servos tribes in existence would result in useless bloodshed and much more could be gained from cooperation. Time showed him wise, and now the plantation enjoys a lucrative trade with the Gibar Snakes tribe and several of its allies.



## SERVOS CROC

DEX: 6 STR: 8 TOU: 9  
PER: 4 WIL: 3 CHA: 4

Initiative: 5/D8  
Number of Attacks: 1  
Attack:  
Bite: 7/D12  
Damage: 14/D20+D4  
Number of Spells: 0  
Spellcasting: NA  
Effect: NA

Unc Rating: 41  
Death Rating: 48  
Wound Threshold: 14

Legend Points: 90  
Equipment: None  
Loot: Crocodile skin value is 1- silver around the Serpent and 3 - silver anywhere else.

Physical Defense: 7  
Spell Defense: 5  
Social Defense: 7  
Physical Armor: 6  
Mystic Armor: 0  
Knockdown: 7/D12  
Recovery Tests: 4

Combat Move: 18/35 water  
Full Move: 35/70 water

## EMPEROR CROCODYLE

DEX: 5 STR: 10 TOU: 9  
PER: 4 WIL: 4 CHA: 3

Initiative: 5/D8  
Number of Attacks: 1  
Attack:  
Bite: 16/D20+D8  
Damage: 20/D20+D8+D6  
Number of Spells: 0  
Spellcasting: NA  
Effect: NA

Unc Rating: 51  
Death Rating: 58  
Wound Threshold: 18

Legend Points: 530  
Equipment: None  
Loot: Emperor Crocodile skin value is 5- silver around the Serpent and 10 - silver anywhere else.

Physical Defense: 7  
Spell Defense: 5  
Social Defense: 4  
Physical Armor: 8  
Mystic Armor: 0  
Knockdown: 16/D20+D12  
Recovery Tests: 4

Combat Move: 18/35 Water  
Full Move: 35/70 water

### Commentary

Servos crocs are quite big compared to their more common cousins, the crocodiles and alligators found in other parts of Barsaive (ED2 313, ED 311, EGC 278-9). An even larger, more rare breed, the emperor crocodile, inhabits only the northern part of the Servos (above the Galanga junction). The emperor crocodile is a huge beast measuring more than twenty-five feet in length (and the occasional forty-foot monster is not unheard of). Its diet consists mainly of other crocodiles, along with smaller fish and the occasional t'skrang. Surprisingly, its presence makes the region around its lair a safer place for swimmers.

On a good or better attack, the emperor croc fastens its jaw on its victim's limb. On the next round the croc will automatically dive and drag its victim under the water, trying to suffocate him. Opening the croc's jaw requires a Strength Test (Difficulty Number 15). Wounding the crocodile will also cause it to release its victim.

## Getting the Party into the Plantation

The easiest way to get a party of heroes into the plantation is to have them hired by the plantation master to solve problematic issues (Several suggestions of such issues are presented below in the Adventure Seeds section). Another option is for them to be hired by Shivalahala K'tenshin who has some serious doubts and suspicions about NesTech'al's conduct (See the, "Trade Center and smuggling operation", below.). If the group is into the trade and profit campaign style, the GM can mention the excellent chance for profits the plantation has to offer (See "Plantation Trade Center prices" section.).

However, most heroes will refuse to have anything to do with house K'tenshin and its slave abusing representatives. In this case the party could be sent to help free a slave or sent to investigate and stop the drug trade by a third party (Like Throal).

Whatever means the GM uses to bring the PC to NesTech'al's plantation he should bear in mind that they need to have a cover story. Strangers rarely visit this corner of Barsaive, and the plantation K'tenshins will be immediately suspicious of anyone with no good reason to be there.

An alternative, and an interesting, choice is to start the PCs as slaves on the plantation. It can serve as a jumping board to any of the plantation suggested plots. Several sections in this article deal with the life of slaves on the plantation, which can help manipulate the PCs into the right mood.

## The Dock

The dock is wedged inside the riverbank using Elemental magic. However, it is always in dire need of reconstruction and repairs after the rainy season. The water rises so swiftly in the spring—woe to anyone caught on the dock or on the riverbank during a flood! A piece of dry land near the river can disappear in a matter of seconds; even t'skrang find it difficult to stay afloat.

Lucky for the plantation, the local t'skrang of the Gibar Snakes tribe somehow know of a coming flood and always give advance warning. An entire construction crew was once lost when their overseer insisted on staying during a rainstorm, despite the warnings. After the incident, NesTech'al forbade anyone to work on the dock during a flood or storm.

In game terms, anyone trying to keep afloat during a flood must make a swimming skill/Talent test

against a Difficulty Number of 15 for every hour in the water just to keep from drowning. Swimming against the current during a flood is impossible.

### The Sunken Pirate Boat

When approaching the dock from the west, a pilot must be careful of a derelict pirate boat lying just beneath the water's surface. During the dry season its bow stands visible above the water and serves as playing ground for the Gibar Snakes children. Rumors on the plantation say it's the boat of a horror marked pirate lord.

Another rumor tells of a treasure, a chest containing booty from decades of robbery and misdeeds. K'tenshins at the plantation have tried to salvage it several times, with no success. When the boat sank, its lower deck was ripped from the hull and swept along the current. The interior scattered across a wide berth of river and disappeared beneath tons of silt. NesTech'al forbade further salvage attempts after several such attempts ended disastrously in the croc and k'sathra infested water.

A treasure chest was onboard when the boat sank, but it broke and all its contents were strewn over two miles of river. At the GM's discretion, a bold and persistent character may salvage part of that treasure, but remember that it is likely tainted from contact with the horror marked captain.

The real treasure is actually the riverboat's fire engine; it has never been salvaged. The entire engine room was separated from the hull and sank beneath the mud, which has kept it in good shape. It could be worth a great deal of money to the right person.

### Adventure Seed – Salvage the Engine

After a particularly rainy season, the mud on Channel S76 moves and reveals the sunken fire engine. An agent of the Throalic Eye learns of this and hires the adventurers to try and salvage it. Of course, raising the heavy fire engine in waters teeming with crocodiles and k'sathra will hardly be an easy task, not to mention the K'tenshins at the plantation will have a thing or two to say about the matter.

### Dragon Crocodile

Servos legends tell of a gigantic breed of crocodile that lives only in the deepest tributaries of the Servos. It is a dragon-sized lizard from ages long forgotten. The strike of its tail, so the story claims, can sink a riverboat. It said to sleep for a year and a day, when

### SERVOS K'SATHRA

DEX: 10 STR: 4 TOU: 9  
PER: 6 WIL: 4 CHA: 4

Initiative: 10/D10+D6  
Number of Attacks: 1-4  
Attack:  
Bite: 10/D10+D6  
Damage: See Below  
Number of Spells: 0  
Spellcasting: NA  
Effect: NA

Physical Defense: 10  
Spell Defense: 6  
Social Defense: 6  
Physical Armor: 0  
Mystic Armor: 0  
Knockdown: 3/D4  
Recovery Tests: 2

Unc Rating: 35  
Death Rating: See Below  
Wound Threshold: 8

Combat Move: 45  
Full Move: 90

Legend Points: 100  
Equipment: None  
Loot: None

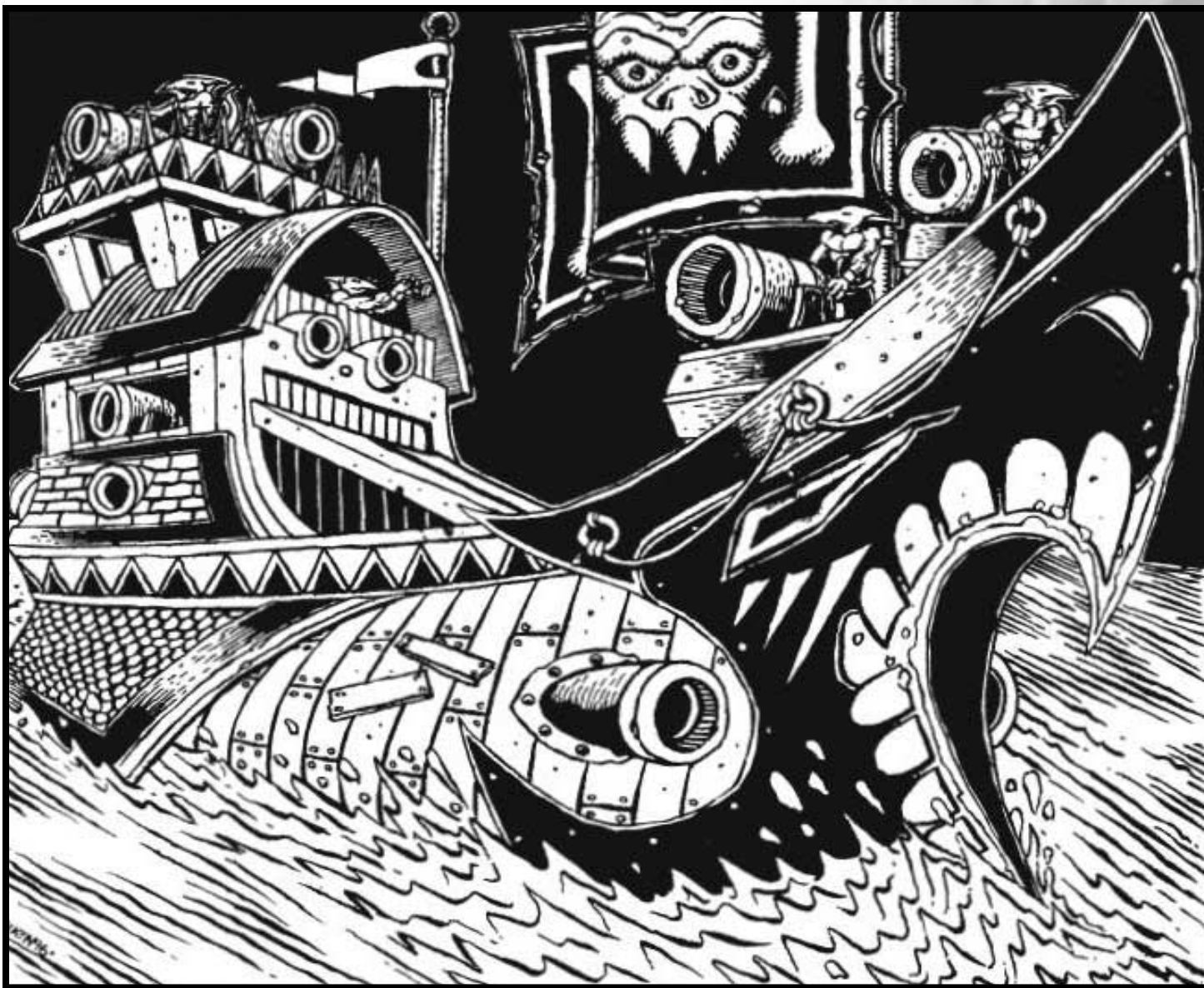
#### Commentary

The Servos k'sathra is a close cousin of the Mist Swamps k'sathra. A school of Servos k'sathra can strip a full-sized herd animal to the bones in a matter of minutes. They prefer warm waters, and since Channel S76 is fed from warm volcanic currents; it is a perfect breeding ground for the killer red fish.

A school of 30 Servos k'sathra makes 1-4 attacks per round, depending on the number of objects within range (A school of Servos k'sathra occupies approximately 20 cubic feet of water). The first attack causes Step 15/D20+D6 damage, the second attack does Step 12/2D10 damage, the third attack Step 9/D8+D6 damage, and the last attack does Step 6/D10 damage. A school of Servos k'sathra automatically disperses if it is brought beneath its Unconsciousness Rating.

K'sathras are almost blind. They locate prey by sound, and they can smell fresh blood. A smart swimmer will check for any wounds before entering the water and will keep movement to a minimum. The Gibar Snakes t'skrang have devised an underwater swimming style that allows them to move unnoticed between hordes of the deadly fish and to hunt them down. They are very fond of k'sathra flesh and a good hunt is always cause for celebration at a Gibar village.





it wakes up and feeds for a month, emptying miles of river of all living creatures.

Another rumor tells of a deep Servos tribe who worships such an animal as though it were a Passion, and they sacrifice captured enemies to appease its hunger.

No statistics of this creature are given here, as the truth or myth of its existence it is up to the GM. Regardless, the GM is advised to drop hints of this creature, just to keep the players on edge.

### **Adventure Seed – Croc Problems**

There have been several sightings of a huge monster swimming near the plantation. The local tribesmen say it is the Dragon Croc, and they claim it has attacked several villages. Even worse, a riverboat bound to NesTech'al's Plantation has disappeared with its entire crew. Rumors spread and boat captains refuse to sail to the plantation. NesTech'al sends an emissary

down the Servos to contact a band of bold adventurers to investigate.

### **Option 1:**

There is no dragon crocodile, but a band of slavers has set up a camp near NesTech'al Plantation. The slavers captured a riverboat by treachery (using inside help) and now use it in their raids and smuggling operations. The K'tenshins claim rights to this area of the Servos according to the Free Trade Compact, and the slavers (who operate without a K'tenshin license) risk execution as pirates.

To keep out snooping noses, the slaver's captain and his assistant (a questor for Upendal) devised a clever plan. They created a big wooden crocodile that looks like the real thing from far away. The crocodile's stomach is hollow and can hold twenty men. Thus submerged, the slavers approach unsuspecting riverside villages and attack, utilizing surprise and the fear in-

duced by the sight of the monster.

### **Option 2:**

The dragon crocodile is real. The band of slavers from the above option built their camp near its hole. Now that the dragon crocodile has woken up, the slavers are in for a nasty surprise.

### **Adventure Seed – Possessed Croc**

Name-givers are not the default prey for Servos crocs. However, from time to time one of these animals becomes desperate due to old age or because it was wounded in battle with another of its kind. Such animals seek easier prey and sometimes they find it in the form of a Name-giver's community. Servos tribes usually recognize such animals early on and hunt them down before the damage can spread.

In the past month there have been many croc attacks on the plantation people and on the Gibar Snakes tribe. Attempts by the plantation's troll Beastmaster to capture the croc have utterly failed.

One night two Gibar Snakes warriors trapped the croc but somehow it escaped, scaring the brave warriors nearly to death. They claimed the giant Servo croc displayed Name-giver intelligence. The Gibar shaman proclaimed the croc a bad spirit and refused to send any more warriors after it. The characters could be hired at this point by K'tenshin representatives to solve the t'skrang eating croc problem.

The truth is not far off from the Gibar Snakes' version. The malicious spirit of the dead pirate captain Black Eel has possessed a 45-foot long emperor crocodile. When under the spirit's sway, the croc behaves like a cunning Name-giver, planning ambushes, escaping traps, etc. The crocodile may also have some interest in Capt. Black Eel's sunken riverboat. The croc has glowing red eyes and shows cunning unknown to a simple beast. The characters will not only need to handle an angry big croc but also send the spirit to rest. If they only kill the croc, the spirit will choose another croc and the problem will start over again.

### **Silent Swim Skill**

In game terms, the Gibar Snakes use a Dexterity-Based skill called Silent Swim and coat themselves in mud and a secret poultice to avoid detection. Each member of the tribe learns Rank 2 Silent Swim or better before entering the dangerous water. The same method can be used against crocodiles and other marine creatures like sharks. The character using the skill rolls his

Silent Swim step, and the result serves as a Perception Test Difficulty Number for any marine creature in the vicinity who does not have eye contact with the character. A character using Silent Swim will always move at 1/3 his Swim Movement. A character with an Untreated Wound cannot use this skill as most marine creatures can follow the trail of his blood. Since many marine creatures hunt by smell, silent swim cannot be used without the poultice.

The Difficulty Number for a marine animal trying to sense a swimmer without this skill is 6 for t'skrang, 5 for all other Name-Givers.

Silent Swim cannot be learned by nont'skrang.

### **Crocboy Stormfist Story Continued...**

A gray wall decorated by fading visages of unknown races and two ugly guard towers with fire cannons greet anyone approaching the plantation from the riverside. A low t'skrang style dome constructed out of wood and bamboo standing outside the wall is the only other Name-giver construction near the waterline. I found out later this building was the plantation Trade Center. It was a minute monarchy with its own rules. The monarch himself was Trade-Master Seley Lamia K'teneir K'tenshin, and I had the dubious pleasure of knowing him up close.

Seley was the first K'tenshin representative we met when our galley finally arrived. I can't say I thought very much of him at first glance. He was small, even for a t'skrang, and he leaned on a walking staff, which only caused him to look shorter. His bodyguard Totach' followed his heels wherever he went. Totach' was almost a head taller than any other t'skrang I had ever seen. In the impossible heat she wore silk and managed to still look regal. A blue-jeweled saber hilt at her side hinted at her true occupation, and the black whip on her other thigh hinted at her hobby. When I first saw them together I figured she was the master and he was her ugly cockroach of a slave.

Aside from his bodyguard, four overseers escorted Seley. The brawny t'skrang were equipped with heavy scimitars. In all the years I'd been at the plantation I have seen the K'tenshins draw their swords on a slave, only three times. For fear and control they carried bullwhips made of crocodile hide.

When the landing stage was lowered, Seley and the overseers climbed onto the deck and started shouting at us to get to shore. They gave each of us a crack of the whip, establishing their dominance and the dan-



ger of disobedience. Anar, the captured escapee got the taste of four lashes.

When Seley caught sight of the poor human, his face lit up with a crooked smile. "Old faces, old friends. We've missed you, Anar." He said to the trembling boy. "Going away without saying goodbye was so impolite. Did you have a nice trip?"

Anar raised his head. He had big eyes, black pools of hatred.

"What's that, aren't you happy to be back?" Seley's smile broadened. "Our new friends here would get the wrong impression about their new home." He addressed us all now. "You must all be wondering where you are. Well, rest assured your questions will be answered in a moment."

We were then ushered to a small clearing behind the warehouse. While we left the docks a small group of slaves coming out of the warehouse loaded the galley with white furs and jade blocks (each the size of a troll's head).

The clearing behind the warehouse was buzzing with activity. A big rotating sawmill operated by the muscle of three strong orks and a mule chopped huge stumps of recently felled timbers. A small team

of slaves constructed the timbers into what looked like a large raft. The wood itself had a silvery white quality like I'd never seen before. That was my first sighting of the famous y'aikara trees of NesTech'al's Plantation

Two K'tenshin overseers sat beside a makeshift table, playing with bone dice. Above them, an old sack of bones in the form of a dwarf sat on a pile of wood, watching the proceedings and smoking a pipe. He was horribly scarred, missing a leg, and his left eye.

"You're running behind schedule as usual, Paskial," Seley said to the old dwarf.

"You let those lazy bums of yours do what they want."

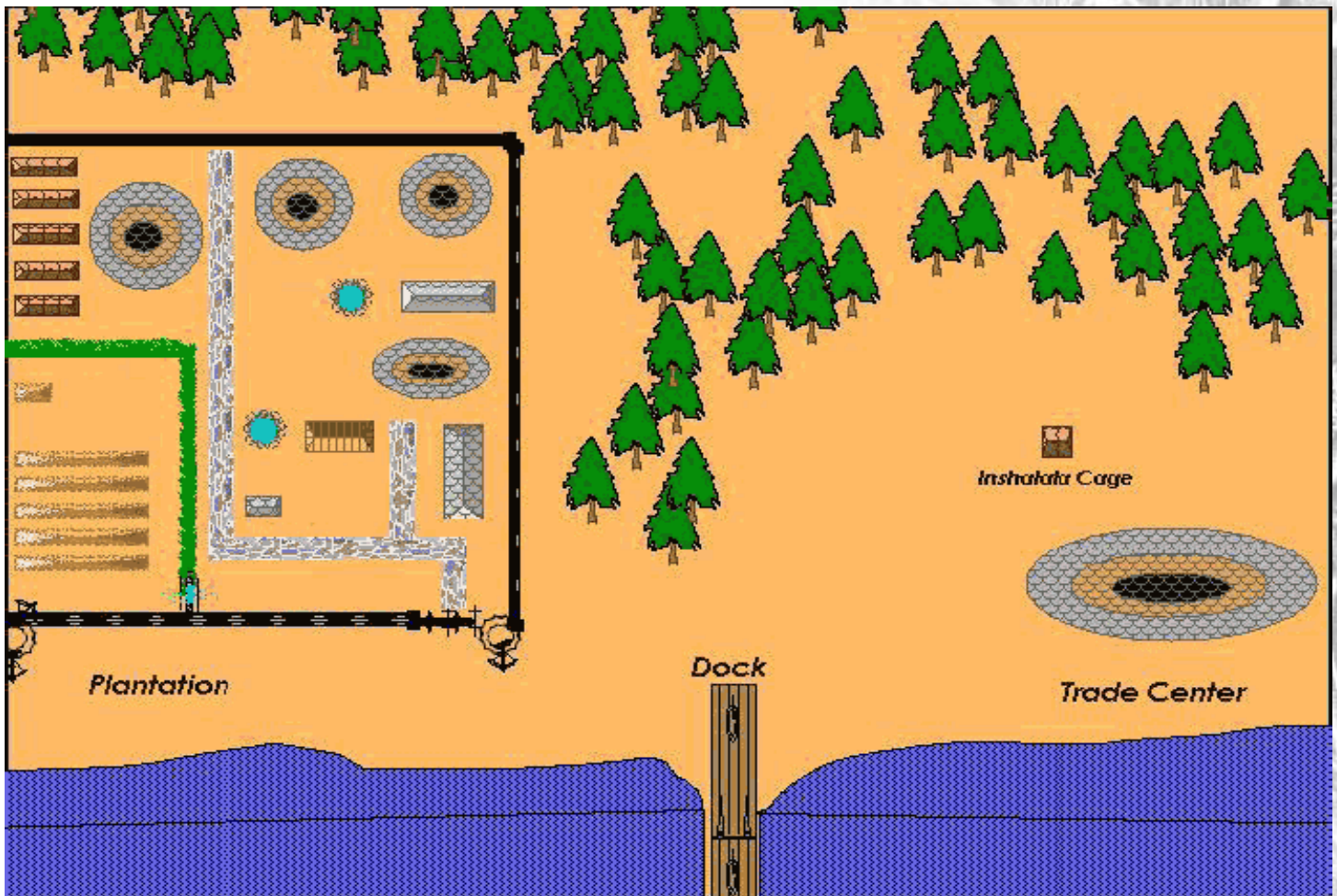
The little man didn't even bother to take the pipe out of his mouth. "I'll worry about mine, Seley, you worry about yours."

"You don't seem to worry enough, dwarf. We found your boy," Seley said.

The dwarf's eyes narrowed. "Anar is here?"

"Yeah, it's still a mystery how he managed to get on the boat." Seley winked. "Must have had help from someone on the plantation."

"Stop spinning around like a boat with no rudder, lizard-boy." The dwarf spat. "If you have anything



to say, say it to my face, otherwise get out of my beard and leave the boy here.”

“Anar is no longer your boy, I’m taking him.”

“By Dis you are, he’s only the best craftsman I’ve ever had on my team.”

“Too bad. We have a special job for him called, ‘Example.’”

The dwarf jumped off the woodpile, displaying amazing agility for someone with a peg leg. Totach’ stepped in front of Seley, her hands resting casually on her belt. She looked like a cobra. “Sit down freak,” she said quietly.

The dwarf’s grizzled face turned red and his hideous scars lit up, making him look like a small Horror. However, anger gave way to reason and Paskial backed down. “If the passions are watching us now, Seley, they’ll make you rot for this.”

Seley slapped his tail, faking amusement, and turned to us. “Listen, maggots,” his voice low and menacing, “this place is called NesTech’al’s Plantation. It is a simple place; nothing like the dung holes you’ve all came from. It has one simple rule. Obey. We keep this cage for people like Anar, who don’t like obeying; people who might need some time to sit in the sun and reflect on the consequences of not obeying.”

The K’tenshin overseer then opened the cage’s door, kicked poor Anar inside, and locked the door with a rusty iron chain. The human youth frantically looked around, his eyes round with fear.

Suddenly the cage shook and something big moved within. Several people cried in fear as we realized what we thought was just a hanging vine was really a huge insect—a troll-size mantis. It dangled upside down and snapped sword-like arms at Anar. He ran to the edge of the cage, but in one blink it was all over, Anar’s head rested between the insect’s thick mandibles. The rest of his body kept on with the momentum for a few more steps then hit the cage bars and crumpled in the corner.

“First strike bam!” Totach’ slammed one fist into her palm.

“Ok, maggots.” Seley turned to us again. “I believe you all know where you are now, or do we need another demonstration?”

## GAME INFORMATION(For GM Eyes Only)

### The Front Yard as a Platform for Launching Merchandise

Currently the plantation activity is focused on

## PASKIAL NAVIR

92 y.o. Non-adept Dwarf

“You call that crap a job well done? You, you son of a million fathers, ya bloody \*&^%\$&@!!!”

DEX: 4 STR: 6 TOU: 9  
PER: 4 WIL: 6 CHA: 3

Initiative: 4/D6  
Number of Attacks: 1  
Attack: 4/D6  
Damage: By weapon  
Number of Spells: 0  
Spellcasting: NA  
Effect: NA

Physical Defense: 5  
Spell Defense: 6  
Social Defense: 4  
Physical Armor: 0  
Mystic Armor: 2  
Knockdown: 3/D4  
Recovery Tests: 2

Unc Rating: 31  
Death Rating: 39  
Wound Threshold: 11

Combat Move: 20 (crippled)  
Full Move: 15

### Racial Abilities

Heat Sight (250 yards)

### Skills

Carpentry 7	11/D10+D8
Craftsman 7	11/D10+D8
Knowledge: Airships 8	12/2D10
Read/Write Language 1	5/D8
Speak Language 2	6/D10
Wood Sculpting 1	4/D6

Legend Points: 42,500  
Equipment: None  
Loot: None

### Commentary

This relic of older times once held a major position in the Jerris shipyards. Due to an unfortunate accident, he lost his leg and an eye leaving him a bit addled. His construction skills, however, have stayed sharp, and he can still manage a worksite.

After his accident, Paskial found it impossible to get another job in Jerris and took to the bottle. NesTech’al K’tenshin stumbled upon him in a bar and recognized him from his glory days when NesTech’al worked as an undercover agent in Jerris shipyards. NesTech’al took pity and invited the old dwarf to work for him at the plantation. The two are close, and NesTech’al has made it clear to several people that harming the dwarf would mean dealing with him.

Paskial is in charge of a small crew of seven slaves and two overseers. His crew shapes the hewn y’aikara logs into floating rafts. Paskial doesn’t care much for the K’tenshin’s abuse of slaves, so he treats his men like a professional crew. Most of the plantation slaves consider working under him a privilege, and they treat the old dwarf with respect despite his quirks.

On two occasions, Paskial has helped slaves from his team escape the plantation. Though Seley suspects Paskial’s involvement, he has no direct evidence against the dwarf.

Paskial is usually gruff. He curses, spits, and talks to himself. He really gets mad whenever someone does a sloppy job. The sight of inept workmanship sends him into fits of rage, and he usually he grabs his tools and fixes whatever is not to his liking. A stream of never ending curses always accompanies these outbursts. The dwarf’s control of street language is enough to make a Horror blush like a maiden.



## INSHALATA

DEX: 9 STR: 9 TOU: 9  
PER: 8 WIL: 4 CHA: 4

Initiative: 9/D10+D8  
Number of Attacks: 4  
Attack:  
Bite: 12/D10  
Damage: 13/D12+D10  
Number of Spells: 0  
Spellcasting: NA  
Effect: NA

Physical Defense: 10  
Spell Defense: 7  
Social Defense: 4  
Physical Armor: 8  
Mystic Armor: 1  
Knockdown: 11/D10+D8  
Recovery Tests: 2

Unc Rating: 32  
Death Rating: 42  
Wound Threshold: 12

Combat Move: 40  
Full Move: 80

Legend Points: 200  
Equipment: None  
Loot: Claws and mandibles worth 1D6 X 10 sp (this accounts as treasure worth LP).

### Commentary

The inshalata is a Servos predator that looks like an oversized mantis. This big insect uses jungle foliage as camouflage and almost always gets the drop on its prey.

Seley uses the inshalata in the cage for sport and to intimidate those he has to deal with (not just slaves). After eating human-sized prey the inshalata can go for two weeks without further need of nourishment. However, it never passes up an opportunity to feast.

Yaerkiz Mazam, the plantation's Beastmaster, captured the inshalata for Seley. The troll Beastmaster now regrets the part he played in caging the big insect, but his fear and dependency on Seley prevents him from taking action.



two very profitable products:

**Y'aikara Wood:** A white tree that grows only at certain locations in the northern Servos. Y'aikara has special magical qualities ideal for constructing airships. It's in high demand throughout Barsaive from Throal to Uru-pa and even in the Blood Wood. (For more details on y'aikara trees, see the Plantation Compound Chapter in a future BoT issue).

**Garbo Fruit:** The y'aikara grows sweet golden fruit, considered a great delicacy in Barsaive and beyond, twice a year. (For more details on garbo fruit, see the Plantation Compound Chapter in a future BoT issue).

### Y'aikara Wood Shipment

Since hauling the huge logs on a riverboat is hardly cost effective, the K'tenshins simply float the wood down river.

Prior to shipment, the y'aikara timber is stored inside the dock warehouse. Then the precious white logs are tied onto barges that flow with the current back to the Serpent and the K'tenshin Niall. In the past, they shipped off a barge as soon as it was ready, accompanied by just two Agents. However since a large shipment was recently stolen, the smallest shipment of y'aikara now contains five barges with at least fifteen soldiers and five to ten Swordmasters and Warrior Adepts (one for each barge) from the War College of house K'tenshin.

### Adventure Seed—Y'aikara Theft

The K'tenshins protect their plantation from river raids using a simple but effective method. Every night the K'tenshins raise two heavy iron chains from the plantation's guard towers across the entire length of the river. These heavy chains are strong enough to stop the sturdiest river vessel.

A representative of House V'strimon approaches the PCs and asks them to help him with a pirating job against the rival house K'tenshin. The objective is a large y'aikara wood shipment from NesTech'al's Plantation. The plan is simple and bold. On the night before the shipment leaves the docks, the barges are tied in the water, and only a few guards are on duty. If the PCs could tie it to a fire engine boat waiting downstream, they could disappear like ghosts into the night.

Anybody who wants to sail past the dock must get rid of the chains first. The mechanism for lowering the chains is located inside the guard tower closest to

the docks. Stealing the barges is a feat that requires both coordination and secrecy, and the GM should NOT award LP for raising an alarm that ends in bloodshed.

### The Backyard

The y'aikara rafts are constructed in a place of almost non-stop activity. Y'aikara crews drag the fallen logs from the jungle and other crews shape them before their river voyage. Orchestrating the rafts' assemblage is an old dwarf named Paskial Navir.

### Overseers

Two K'tenshin overseers (Kaimana and Asikath) work under Paskial. His kind treatment of slaves doesn't match the two t'skrangs' worldview (See Abanos Niall overseers for more details about Kaimana and Asikath's worldview) and leaves them with little to do all day. In their frustration they have turned to NesTech'al a couple of times, but NesTech'al is a brick wall in everything that concerns the dwarf. They are considering approaching Seley, though they know a favor from Seley is one that will be collected tenfold.

For Kaimana and Asikath's statistics, use Abanos Niall overseers.

### Adventure Seed— Assassination Attempt

If the PCs are visitors to the plantation, Paskial might want to have a word with them. Several attempts have been made on his life in the past month, and he wants to find the guilty party.

Someone put a deadly asp in his bedroll and someone forgot to lock the inshalata cage when he happened to be the only one nearby. Blind luck saved him on both occasions, and he is afraid he has no more to spare.

It is up to the GM if Seley, who hates Paskial's guts, Kaiman, Asikath, or maybe even someone else, made the attempts on the dwarf's life.

### Slaves

Seven human and ork slaves work in the raft

construction team. Some of them have worked under Paskial's rule for more than two years and have acquired significant carpentry skills. Highly skilled workers are great assets. Compared to the other plantation's slaves, the raft construction team enjoys several privileges, including better meals and the privilege of extra rest when there are no y'aikara trees to work on. Paskial always objects strongly to attempts by other foremen to take control of "off-duty" construction slaves.

### Inshalata Cage

In the corner of the backyard stands a hardened bamboo cage where Seley keeps the captive inshalata.

### Crocboy Stormfist Story Continued...

My size and strength determined my initial assignment at NesTech'al's plantation would be hauling timbers from the y'aikara grove to the docks.

It's less than two miles from the y'aikara grove to the Trade Center, but two miles can seem an eternity to a team of slaves hauling four-ton logs through muddy earth and hostile jungle.. At some point during my first day, I thought I would pass out from exhaustion. Two people usually share a rope, and I was assigned with an old ork named Hadim. Though he looked

venerable compared to me, I think he did most of the work that day.

It was hot and humid, the sort of weather that gnaws under the skin. It never bothered to rain, and the occasional light drizzle just intensified the humidity and our misery. The ropes scraped my skin raw and opened bloody wounds for the pleasure of a million red Servos flies. Around us a bunch of wild t'skrang kids, some not higher than my knee, were running in and out of the trees. Sometimes they would stop and stare at us with dumbfounded eyes as we hauled the massive logs. Obviously we were the best show in town.

I was ready to collapse when someone beat me to it. A man fell down and curled on the black earth like a baby in his mother's womb. A human; I believe he was young, but it was hard to tell beneath all the





## YAERKIZ MAZAM

Troll Beastmaster, Fourth Circle

DEX: 4 STR: 7 TOU: 7  
PER: 6 WIL: 6 CHA: 7

Initiative: 4/D6  
Number of Attacks: 1  
Attack: 8/2D6  
Damage: 14/D20+D4  
Number of Spells: 0  
Spellcasting: NA  
Effect: NA

Physical Defense: 5  
Spell Defense: 6  
Social Defense: 9  
Physical Armor: 0  
Mystic Armor: 2  
Knockdown: 3/D4  
Recovery Tests: 3

Unc Rating: 58  
Death Rating: 70  
Wound Threshold: 12

Combat Move: 50  
Full Move: 25

Karma Points: 6

Karma Step: 3/D4

### Racial Abilities

Heat Sight

### Discipline Abilities

Beastmaster 4: May spend Karma on Recovery Tests

### Talents

Animal Bond 5	12/2D10
Animal Training 5	12/2D10
Borrow Sense 4	10/D10+D6
Cat's Paw 4	8/2D6
Claw Shape 4	14/D20+d4
Creature Analysis 2	8/2D6
Dominate Beast 5	12/2D10
Durability (7/6) 4	—
Frighten Animal Servants 4	11/D10+D8
Karma Ritual 4	—
Thread Weaving – Beast 2	8/2D6
Tracking 2	8/2D6
Unarmed Combat 4	8/2D6

### Knacks

Claw Tool 2	Find Animal Companion
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### Skills

Anatomy 4	10/D10+D6
Body Painting 1	8/2D6
Flirting 1	8/2D6
Hunting 4	8/2D6
Lore: Beasts 1	7/D12
Melee Weapons – Axes 1	5/D8
Parry – Flail 1	5/D8
Read/Write Language 1	7/D12
Speak Language 2	8/2D6
Surprise Strike – Battle-axe 1	5/D8

Legend Points: 21,300  
Equipment: None  
Loot: None

### Commentary

This troll Beastmaster is an outcast from the Mazam noble house in the Rugaria province. He comes from a very long line of lowland troll nobles. Early on he rebelled against everything

mud. The ropes had scraped the flesh from his shoulder almost to the bone.

“Come on, Nadav,” the overseer called, “stop fooling around.”

The man put his hands over his ears and curled into a tighter ball.

“It’s too damn hot for this kind of shit!” As she spoke, the overseer loosened her whip. “You there.” She pointed to one of the guards. “Run along back to the plantation. Tell Yaerkiz to get off his skinny ass or we’ll be stuck here for the night. He was supposed to be here an hour ago.” She then walked over to the fallen man, talked to him, threatened, then used the whip, but the fallen slave wouldn’t budge an inch. Disgusted, she finally turned to Hadim and me. “You two, this is not a break. Take machetes from the cart and start clearing the pass until Yaerkiz comes.”

“Bloody jungle,” Hadim said when we were far from earshot, “the faster you chop it the faster it grows. That shrub over there, I’ll be a green tailed t’skrang if I didn’t cut it yesterday.” We attacked the vegetation. I tried to imitate Hadim’s slow methodical movements, determined to learn from the more experienced man.

“Let’s not move too far from the group.” Hadim said when we left the team behind one curve.

“Afraid they might think we plan to escape?” I said.

“Escape?” Hadim snorted. “That’s a new one. In case you didn’t notice, my greenhorn brother, we are in the middle of a bloody jungle.”

“Easier to lose pursuit in a jungle,” I said.

“You wouldn’t last a day.”

“It can’t be that tough. Some of those t’skrang kids back there are no more than three years old.”

“Three years wiser than you, brother. Better forget it. That’s not why I want us to stay near the group. The local cats know very well that we use this pass. Two men alone is just the opportunity they’re waiting for. That guard sent to fetch Yaerkiz, you saw how frightened he was.”

I was about to ask who Yaerkiz was, when a bellow, not unlike a loud trumpet, sounded behind us. We rushed back to meet a terrible sight. I’ve seen elephants on Thera before, but always at a distance, and I’ve never seen one so mad. The creature lifted a guard standing in its path with its trunk, and tossed him like a clay doll almost trampling him beneath its feet.

“Garlen have mercy, where did it come from?” I cried as we scrambled into the trees.

“That’s Mirelin.” Hadim’s frightened look

probably mirrored mine “Pet of that no good Beastmaster Yaerkiz; I’ve never seen her so berserk.”

The hysterical cry of a frightened child came from behind us. I turned and saw one of the Gibar Snake toddlers stuck in the path of the raging Mirelin. He must have been playing among the branches of the y’aikara timber and got trapped.

I don’t know what came over me that day. Despair? In the cruel world I was tossed into, the only beacon of normality was about to be trampled under the feet of a mad elephant. Heedless of the consequences, I jumped back into the trail, hollering like crazy, hoping my shouting would take the beast’s attention away from the trapped kid. When that failed I ran to the child, pulled him out of the branches, and rolled to the side, mere inches from a huge gray leg. I rose up and ran; Mirelin, trumpeting murder, crashed after me. I was on the tree line when the elephant slammed into my back and sent me flying into the air. My grip of the t’skrang failed, and I landed face first in the mud. Despite the dizzying pain I tried to get up. My eyes were covered in mud, but I could still hear the creature approaching, meaning to finish what it started. I mumbled a short prayer to Garlen, hoping my end would be swift, but the final blow never landed.

Clearing mud from my eyes I blinked in the dim sunlight cascading through the heavy foliage. A tall troll stood between Mirelin and me. He was patting her and whispering calming words into her sail-like ears. The troll had a tattered shirt and mud covered pantaloons with more holes than fiber. He looked so dirty, unkempt and starving thin I first thought him a wild beast rather than a Name-giver.

“Are you all right dear chap?” he said.

If he had turned into a frog, I don’t think I would have been more surprised.

“You look a bit addled my dear fellow, were you hurt?” The Elephant gently touched the troll’s horns that grew from his head like snakes with the same trunk it almost murdered me with a moment ago.

I blinked stupidly.

“You took quite a beating.” Contrary to his calm words the troll looked ready to collapse. Sweat poured from him as he spoke, and his bloodshot eyes were wild, blinking constantly despite the dim light. I later learned to recognize such oddities as sure sign of a man under the influence of the Dust of Dreams.

“A beating?” I said. “That mad beast almost made an omelet out of me.”

“Yes well, dreadfully sorry about that, my dear

## YAERKIZ MAZAM

(Continued)

he was brought up to be. His father, appalled by his behavior and chosen occupation, kicked him out of the house and marked him off the will. This suited young Yaerkiz just fine, and he went to meet his fortune among his brothers in the Twilight Peaks. Sadly, the young troll found out he had no common ground whatsoever with his raiding brothers. Going back home was admitting defeat, so Yaerkiz drifted for some years in southern Barsaive. In the Servos he found a teacher for Beastmaster magic, as well as Mirelin, a baby Servos elephant who was left to die after her mother was hunted down for ivory. After finishing his training, he continued drifting over the Servos looking for companionship and doing odd jobs until NesTech’al hired him.

Young Yaerkiz was easy prey for Seley, the Trade Master, who got him hooked on a dream-inducing drug. His dependency on Dust of Dreams is so great that he will do anything Seley asks him.

Yaerkiz appears to be the absolute troll Beastmaster cliché until he opens his mouth. Unlike many Beastmasters, he doesn’t prefer animals to Name-giver companionship. Yaerkiz is well spoken, educated, cheerful, and has impeccable manners.

When he is in the world of self-induced dreams, however, Yaerkiz is still polite and cheerful but most of his actions and words have only a thin connection to reality. More importantly, commanding his beasts while under the influence could result in disaster. However, even after several “accidents” NesTech’al didn’t send Yaerkiz packing. The plantation master is aware Beastmasters are rare, and those willing to work for such an organization as his are rarer still. He recognizes Mirelin is an invaluable asset to the plantation and so far has dismissed Yaerkiz with a mere admonition.

## MIRELIN

Servos Elephant

DEX: 8 STR: 14 TOU: 10  
PER: 8 WIL: 8 CHA: 6

Initiative: 4/D6  
Number of Attacks: 1  
Attack:

Trample: 4/D6  
Damage: 16/D20+d8  
Number of Spells: 0  
Spellcasting: NA  
Effect: NA

Unc Rating: 45  
Death Rating: 52  
Wound Threshold: 15

Legend Points: 50  
Equipment: None  
Loot: None

Physical Defense: 5  
Spell Defense: 5  
Social Defense: 5  
Physical Armor: 4  
Mystic Armor: 0  
Knockdown: 11/D10+D8  
Recovery Tests: 5

Combat Move: 50  
Full Move: 100

### Commentary

Mirelin is a fully-grown female elephant. She is usually quite docile, but her connection with a drug addicted Beastmaster causes her to act unexpectedly sometimes. She killed three men during one incident, though there were no eyewitnesses. Since scavengers took care of the bodies, their deaths weren’t attributed to her.



fellow,” he said and walked away as if we were discussing the weather. Mirelin followed on his heels, docile as a puppy.

I had just met Yaerkiz Mazam, the plantation’s troll Beastmaster.

I was barely able to walk, and I later learned I had broken two ribs. I was sent back to the compound with poor Nadav. He had been lying in the mud, curled up, during the entire ordeal. Despite the healer’s best efforts Nadav died that night mumbling with fever. He lost the will to live. It happened sometimes on the plantation.

I was relieved from duty for a couple of days. When I returned to the ropes team I found Yaerkiz and his elephant, Mirelin, had resumed working as if nothing had happened. I never learned to feel comfortable around Mirelin, but I couldn’t help learning to appreciate her strength. With her around, predators were reluctant to attack, not to mention hauling the ropes became more tolerable.

As for me, the toddler I saved, whose name was Belly Crawler, took to dogging at my heels. Language was a barrier, but in three months I was fluent enough in Servos dialect of the wild t’skrang to talk with my new friend

## **GAME INFORMATION(For GM Eyes Only)**

### **Ropes Duty**

A GM intending to include in his campaign, spreading the word of freedom in Barsaive could give the PCs a taste of slavery at NesTech’al’s Plantation. A new party could simply start as slaves on the plantation. The GM who chooses this campaign style is advised to emphasize the dark mood of slave life on the plantation. The low regard to Name-giver life combined with the harsh conditions could be the spark to motivate your players into the “freedom fighter kind of thinking”. Further information on using the plantation for running a slave campaign will be included in a future volume of BoT.

### **Game Mechanics**

Working the ropes, that is, dragging the y’aikara logs from the grove to the docks, is strenuous work. Every day of ropes assignment the character needs to check his Toughness step against Difficulty Number of 4. Failure means the character suffers step 4/d6 Damage from the ropes.

Optional Rule:

Ork’s exceptional endurance allows them to add two steps for the Toughness tests.

### **Note About Overseers, Guards and Ropes Duty**

Ropes duty is considered the worst job on the plantation not only for slaves but also for the slaves’ overseers and guards. Seley, who is responsible for the rope roster, usually gives this assignment as a form of punishment—another form of leverage to keep those under him on a tight leash.

Usually there are two overseers and four guards for every twenty slaves though these numbers may vary greatly according to Seley’s whim and specific conditions. For overseers and guards statistics see below.

## **Crocboy Stormfist Story Continued...**

When we weren’t hauling y’aikara trees, we hauled boat cargo. Compared to working at the ropes this work was easy, though during high trade times it too required the stamina of an ox. Twice a year, the y’aikara trees would yield extremely sweet golden fruit called garbo, a delicacy in all parts of Barsaive and beyond. During garbo harvest week five boats a day, sometimes more, would come to the plantation to trade and collect the valuable cargo.

Garbo harvest week at the docks was a celebration of trade. A few wild tribes on good standing with the Gibar Snakes emerged from the jungle to ply their wares. Other more northerly plantations also made an appearance in hope of selling their own harvest. The plantation, of course, charged a tax on every deal cut on shore.

My quick grasp of the native t’skrang language made me a choice candidate for the job of assisting the merchants coming to shore. So after four months at the plantation I found myself performing as a walking parcel for an obese, sun-bleached Theran ork who winked at me as if we shared a mutual secret.

“Who’s the man in-charge of this stockade? I wish to buy the whole lot.” The Theran said, pinching my bottom, winking at me, and smiling all the while.

I pointed at the purple jungle t’skrang. “He stands in front of you, master.”

“This kid?” He winked again. “You’re joking?”

“He’s not a boy, master. The local t’skrang are simply shorter than you’re used to.”

“Bloody Dis.” The Theran waved his hands, as if trying to encompass the whole stockade. “You there,

runt! How much for the whole lot?"

The tribesman took a step back; the ork's bulbous hand must have looked threatening.

"Don't give me that crooked face." Wink, smile, wink. "Name your price!"

The tribesman nodded his head and slapped his tail twice.

The Theran cursed, pulled out a purse, and started pouring shiny gold coins into his sweaty palm.

The small tribesman chattered something fast.

"What was that? What did he say, pretty boy?"

"It's Servos lingo master. I understand only parts of it. I think he is honored by your suggestion but he has no use for money. He wants to make a trade." Actually I believe the tribesman offered the Theran to shove his yellow discs where the lightquartz didn't shine, but I felt no need to share that piece of information.

"Ask him what he wants, boy!" As he spoke, the Theran laid a much too friendly hand on my shoulder.

"Master," I said, wondering how I might refuse his advances without getting beat, but knowing I couldn't, "you might want to use the services of one of the plantation traders. They can exchange your coins with iron arrowheads. That'll be more to his liking."

"How much will that cost me? Don't try to trick me boy, you're not half as smart for that."

"I assure you the K'tenshin masters will offer a fair deal."

"And thundra beasts will sprout wings and fly."

He eventually allowed one of the plantation traders to act as negotiator. And just as he expected, they cheated him blind. The plantation trader took twice as many Imperial coins from him as were actually paid to the tribesman in iron arrowheads, but in the end both sides were satisfied. Even after he was fleeced out of good money, the Theran paid a quarter of the sum for each slave he would have paid in any civilized location.

Lucky for me, the lengthy negotiations in the sun leached all the fat ork's energy, as well as any carnal plans he had for me.

## GAME INFORMATION(For GM Eyes Only)

### Front Yard as a Trade Center

The dock's warehouse serves as a trade center as well as a warehouse. Representatives from other

## TRADE ASSISTANTS

23 y.o. T'skrang Non-adept

"I see you are only interested with the exceptionally rare. We have an excellent deal this week just for your taste, a genuine feather from a majestic jungle griffin."

DEX: 5 STR: 4 TOU: 4  
PER: 6 WIL: 5 CHA: 6

Initiative: 5/D8  
Number of Attacks: 1  
Attack: 5/D8  
Damage: 4/D6  
Number of Spells: 0  
Spellcasting: NA  
Effect: NA

Physical Defense: 7  
Spell Defense: 8  
Social Defense: 7  
Physical Armor: 0  
Mystic Armor: 0  
Knockdown: 4/D6  
Recovery Tests: 2

Unc Rating: 19  
Death Rating: 28  
Wound Threshold: 7

Combat Move: 29  
Full Move: 57

### Racial Abilities

Tail Attack

### Skills

Bribery 3	9/D8+D6
Economics 5	11/D10+D8
Evaluate 6	12/2D10
Haggle 5	11/D10+D8
Local Lore 5	11/D10+D8
Read/Write Language 2	8/2D6
Speak Language 3	9/D8+D6
Trading - Animals 5	11/D10+D8
Trading - Clothing 5	11/D10+D8
Trading - Equipment 5	11/D10+D8
Trading - Information 5	11/D10+D8
Trading - Plantation Products 5	11/D10+D8
Trading - Slaves 5	11/D10+D8
Trading - Weapons 5	11/D10+D8
Wild T'skrang Language 2	8/2D6

Legend Points: 36,900  
Equipment: None  
Loot: None

### Commentary

T'kalien K'tenshin, a former employee of NesTech'al, ran the original trade crew. Soon after Seley was hired for the job as Trade Master, T'kalien was found guilty of dealing with contraband and had to depart in shame. Most of his crew left with him or met with unfortunate accidents.

Seley handpicked the six trade assistants working at the trade center today. They are all shrewd negotiators who could con a blood elf into buying thorns. The assistants receive a basic salary and take commissions from each sale. This arrangement encourages them to strive for the best deal possible for the plantation. All of them are considered Seley's men, and they are all aware of his game with the numbers.

Being a trade assistant requires constant dealings with the local tribes of wild t'skrang. Each trade assistant can speak the local dialect.



K'tenshin plantations often come to Nestech'al's to trade for necessities and news. The Gibar Snakes tribe and the few other local tribes who are on good terms with the Snakes, come to the trade center to sell their wares: furs, wild plants, jade, fish, meat, exotic and not so exotic beasts, feathers, slaves, and anything else that the jungle grows.

The tribesmen don't value coins and, contrary to belief, shiny beads won't do the trick either. They willingly trade for necessities they cannot produce in the jungle, mainly iron and crystal tools, especially knives, swords and arrowheads. Since many traders don't come equipped to deal with the wild t'skrang tribesmen, and most of the tribesmen don't speak Throalic, the trade center representatives usually offer their services as negotiators. The trade center is fully equipped with enough iron and crystal arrowheads to seal every deal. The downside of this arrangement is the trader usually pays twice what he would have paid had he dealt with the tribesmen directly. Still, the opportunities are tempting enough the K'tenshin overpricing doesn't deter would be traders. Despite the complexity, several things can be bought at the plantation for a much lower price than anywhere else in Barsaive.

Each trade is processed under the supervising eye of Seley or one of his assistants. By K'tenshin law, the Aropagoi is entitled to 15 percent of every trade made at the center and the other 85 percent goes to the plantation's vaults.

Seley has made it a rule to pocket between 17 and 25 percent from unsuspecting merchants, although he never uses this sham with house K'tenshin traders for fear of exposing himself. Seley works in cahoots with the plantation's accountant,

Asadakil K'tenshin. Asadakil is responsible for writing down every deal in the plantation's books. He always fixes the numbers so they can pass any inspection. Asadakil also has a separate book at a hidden location where he keeps all the real numbers.

House K'tenshin agents have long whispered into their Shivalahala's ears the NesTech'al's Plantation is fleecing the house. The Shivalahala sends the PCs to collect incriminating evidence.

Getting the hidden account book from Asadakil is an obvious option. Several K'tenshin traders know of its existence despite the secrecy. Asadakil uses secret abbreviations to record all the transactions. It is up to the GM to decide if a successful Read and Write Languages roll is sufficient to decipher the Asadakil's code or whether the PCs need Asadakil's help. The PCs could also hear about a deciphering tool that holds the key for the account book.

### Plantation Trade Center Prices

The following table provides a sample of the products for sale at the trade center. The items marked with a star may be purchased with silver pieces. The rest can sometimes be traded with various tribesmen for something of an equal value or bought for silver pieces via a trade center negotiator at double the listed price. The numbers in parenthesis reflect the item's usual price on the open market elsewhere in Barsaive.

**Table I Plantation Trade Center Prices.**

Garbo fruit*	– 10sp/pound (200sp / pound).
Basilisk eye	– 40sp (200sp)
Death moth wings	– 40sp (200sp)
Felux eyes	– 50sp (300sp)
Greater termite pincers	– 1sp (15sp)
Inshalata claws	– 6sp (50sp)
Jade blocks (approx 6 lb each)	– 110sp(400sp)
Jaguar pelt	– 20sp (80sp).
Jungle griffin feathers	– 30sp (150sp)
Parrots feathers	– 5sp/pound (50sp/pound).
Stinger poison sack	– 5sp (100sp)
Troajin young	– 30 (300)
Wild bees honey	– 1sp/pound (10–15sp/pound).
Wild thundra (young)	– 200sp (800sp).
Zoaks	– 30sp (250sp).



As a rule, K'tenshins support Cathan who sell their fellow wild t'skrangs and not vice versa. Many Cathan tribesmen help K'tenshin and Theran slaving parties in capturing wild t'skrang in return for immunity.

The plantation's unique relation with the Gibar Snakes, and its location near the tribe's camp, has dictated a change of politics. Early on NesTech'al forbade any slave trade with jungle t'skrang in the vicinity of the plantation. Since he didn't want to lose the lucrative income entirely, NesTech'al also declared open season for Cathan enslaving.

Most wild t'skrang tribes around the plantation have little remorse in selling their fellow Name-givers just as the

Cathan feel no remorse in doing the same when the tables are turned. Many local tribes started running slaving parties in return for outside world merchandise. For some reason the tribe who seats nearest to the planta-

tion, the Gibar Snakes, chooses not to practice slavery, however they allow some friendly tribes to practice it within their territory, for a price.

### **Crocboy Stormfist Story Continued...**

It was my second garbo harvest week at the plantation when I made a very serious and almost fatal mistake. Just being outside the shade felt like taking a bath in Death's Sea. Everybody was on edge, their nerves fried from the sun. The overseers snapped their whips at the slightest provocation.

The dry season had just begun, so the channel waterline was still high. The wharf extended a long way into the river, but still could dock only two boats at a time. Each time a merchant concluded his deals we had to work like Raggok himself was sitting on our backs. The freight would be tossed as quickly as pos-

sible so the boat could clear out, making room for the next one. It's exhausting work lifting garbo crates, and a real test of nerves and strength when you're dragging a frightened Troajian cub up the gangplank.

Something in the air was wrong. All the good deals got botched, as if some Horror had put a jinx on the traders. On top of it all a K'tenshin inspection delegation chose to appear just at the start of the harvest week. Perhaps someone had tipped the K'tenshin Shiv-alahala the plantation Trade-Master was swindling the House out of its rightful revenues, or perhaps they'd come to lay their hands on a huge shipment of illegal weeds.

Two bookish t'skrang inspectors entered the

small trade center archive with the plantation's accountant early in the morning. At high noon, the door was still barred. Seley fumed. Everyone around him walked on tiptoes to avoid winding up in the inshalata cage. We had just finished secur-



ing a huge pile of crates to a boat when Seley's bodyguard, Totach', came up to Hadim and me.

"See those crates?" Totach's tail didn't twitch, a sure sign of nervousness on a t'skrang. "Take fifteen men with you. I want them stacked on the Haropakile."

"That's the Esmeralda's freight, mistress," Hadim said quietly.

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes, mistress!" Hadim bowed his head.

"See those five small duari?" She pointed at a separate stack that sat under a palm not far away. "I want them under the white sail near the bow. And Hadim."

"Yes, mistress?"

"Be careful with them or I'll personally make you sorry."



"What's so special about these duari?" I asked Hadim after she went away.

"Sometime s it is best to remain ignorant," was his cryptic reply.

It took us twenty minutes to secure the crates and duari. As we loaded the last crate Totach' ran onto the Haropakilea, waving her hands hysterically. "That's the wrong boat, you dolts, that's the Esmeralda's freight! You've put it on the wrong boat!" she screamed.

"We've been told to put it here, mistress," one of the new slaves, a small ork named Eved, said.

The whip lashed once, and Eved crumpled to the ground, clutching at his bleeding face. "Who do you think you're talking to?" The overseers rarely let their whips lick our faces. Such a lash could disfigure a man for life.

"What happened here?" One of the inspectors from the delegation asked. "Why have they loaded the Haropakilea when you've told us it's ready to depart? I've told you I don't want a crate to go on any boat without our inspection. I want all these crates opened now!"

Totach', who was usually calmer than an obsidian, looked like she was ready to slit her own throat. "Sir, it's just a stupid mistake. The crates should have gone to the Esmeralda but these idiots have loaded the wrong boat. We will be taking them all down for a thorough inspection. No point in delaying the Haropakilea, sir."

"Ok then." The K'tenshin inspector wasn't satisfied, but every t'skrang knew the importance of keeping a schedule. "Just be quick with it."

We hauled one hundred duari off the boat quickly; Totach's strange behavior warned us that we should be on our toes.

"That's it!" Totach' said. "Good work." If t'skrang could sweat then there would have been buckets pouring out of her right then.

"Mistress, there are five more duari crates left over there." Eved pointed at a corner where the five "special" crates that we had loaded earlier lay in the shade of a white sail.

"No they're not," Totach' spoke between her teeth, "leave them where they lie, idiot. They belong to the boat."

Eved wasn't the brightest of kids, and he moved towards the crates. "No they aren't, mistress, I've just put them there five minutes ago."

I looked at Totach', and her eyes almost popped

out of their sockets. She was itching to use the whip again but obviously didn't want to get the inspector's attention again.

"I'll skin that kid alive, and you with him, Hadim." She said quietly. I looked at the crates and noticed a unique red mark in the shape of tiny claws on the side of each. The inspector turned around; he must have sniffed that something was wrong.

"What did you said, boy?" he asked Eved.

"I said that these... Ouch."

Eved never finished what he was saying because my elbow connected with his jaw. "Master." I bowed using the submissive form I had learned in more civilized times. "This boy here made a bet with Swordmaster Totach' that I couldn't run with the crocs."

"Run with the crocs?"

"A game we play here, master. See that gray monster on the far bank?"

"I'm not blind, boy."

"Well, Eved here made a bet with Totach' that I wouldn't dare go thirty yards from it."

"You're pulling my tail!"

"Are you willing to put your coins on it, master?"

"I'll put twenty silvers that you'll end up as croc lunch, boy. From whom will I be collecting?"

"Swordmistress Totach' will match you coin to coin." I figured that if Totach' was going to lose her money then I wouldn't be here to receive her wrath anyway.

All thought of inspecting crates was forgotten. Work came to a halt and everyone's eyes became glued to the water when I leapt off the boat. The river was warm like always. If not for the task ahead I would have enjoyed the refreshing caress after the hog sweaty day. Luckily the k'sathra weren't active at high noon. They preferred hunting in the morning and at night when the jungle animals came for a drink. But I still kept a careful watch on the gray creature in front of me. Nine times in ten a croc won't leave his perch on shore to pursue prey. He'll only go into the water when he is really hungry. I've seen the Gibar Snakes swim within an arm's length of a croc, fearless. They seem to have a natural, almost mystical knowledge of when the beasts are satiated and when it is safe to approach. I, on the other hand, had no clue of the ugly reptile's appetite. Its huge open maw looked like the gateway to the realm of the thirteenth Passion. I made a thousand silent promises to Jasprey as I paddled my arms and legs slowly, trying to imitate the way the wild t'skrang

## TOTACH K'THEIR

26 y.o. Female T'skrang Swordmaster, Sixth Circle

"Are you willing to put your saber where your mouth is?"

DEX: 8 STR: 6 TOU: 6  
PER: 6 WIL: 4 CHA: 3

Initiative: 5/D8  
Number of Attacks: 1  
Attack: By talent  
Damage: By weapon  
Number of Spells: 0  
Spellcasting: NA  
Effect: NA

Physical Defense: 10  
Spell Defense: 7  
Social Defense: 9  
Physical Armor: 7  
Mystic Armor: 0  
Knockdown: 6/D10  
Recovery Tests: 3

Unc Rating: 65  
Death Rating: 80  
Wound Threshold: 10

Karma Points: 10

Combat Move: 45  
Full Move: 90

Karma Step : 4/D6

### Racial Abilities

Tail Attack

### Discipline Abilities

Swordmaster 4: May spend Karma on any action requiring Dexterity only.

Swordmaster 5: May spend Karma to increase the damage of any attack made with a sword.

### Talents

Avoid Blow 6	14 /D20+D4
Disarm 6	14/D20+D4
Durability 6 (7/6)	—
Heartening Laugh 6	12/2D10
Karma Ritual 4	—
Maneuver 6	14/D20+D4
Melee Weapons 7	15/D20+D6
Parry 6	17/D20+D10
Riposte 6	17/D20+D10
Second Weapon 6	14/ D20+D4
Speak Language 2	8/2D6
Taunt 6	12/2D10
Thread Weaving - Blade 3	—
Throwing Weapons 6	14/D20+D4
Trap Initiative 3	11/D10+D8
Winning Smile 3	9/D8+D6
Wound Balance 6	12/2D10

### Knacks

Draw Fire Missile Parry

### Skills

Conspiracy 3	9/D8+D6
Dancing 1	7/D12
Detect Trap 1	7/D12
Etiquette 4	10/D10+D6
Flirting 3	9/D8+D6
Gambling 4	10/D10+D6
Lore, Racial: T'skrang 4	10/D10+D6
Nature 4	10/D10+D6
Pilot Boat 2	6/D10

Read River 2 8/2D6  
Read/Write Language 2 8/2D6  
Speak Language 3 9/D8+D6

Legend Points: 59,800

Equipment: T'leck's Saber 17/D20+D10, Whip 9/D8+D6, T'leck's Gauntlets, Belt, Boots, Soft, Brooch, Silver, Cloak, Sat-in— or silk-lined, Jacket, Silk, Robe, Elfweave, Booster potion, Last Chance potion, Absorb Blow, Strength Booster.

Loot: None

### Commentary

Formerly known as Totach' Siandra K'their V'strimon, this beautiful swordmaster was once a promising champion in the house of V'strimon. Despite her tendency to get into fights, she managed to rise like a shooting star in the Aropagoi Ranks. At the early age of twenty she became the pride of her Niall when she was assigned as "attack force commander" on the new Aropagoi warship, Soul of V'ranna.

She personally received a badge of honor from the hands of Shivalahala V'strimon after storming an Iskarat warship full of Swordmasters in a small skirmish later known as V'ranna's wrath. Her second badge of honor came after a successful year long campaign against the southern reach pirates. Later that year, however, she was accused of taking some of the booty captured in the campaign. The allegations were severe and though no hard evidence was ever produced, the V'strimon Trade Council removed her from duty. Under the pressure of her Niall's Lahala (Lahala Siandra), the Council gave her a more modest job: Captain of the Honor Guard for the K'tenshin ambassador in Urupa.

Her removal from duty did nothing to decrease her tendency to get into brawls. Soon she was the center of several scandalous affairs in Urupa. One night she got into a fight with an ex-lover and killed him. Sadly, the dead lover was an important member of the Throalic embassy. Throal demanded retribution and Totach' was given the worst punishment for an Aropagoi member—they cut off her tail and sent her into exile, removing her title and rank.

A year later Seley found her in Travar, drunk and feeling sorry for herself. She had no other options, and was willing to work for a member of the hated house K'tenshin. Seley had only started building his little empire at the plantation, and as a hated persona, he felt the dire need for protection. His paranoia prevented him from hiring anyone from his own Aropagoi and Totach' appeared at just the right time.

Today she serves as a personal bodyguard for Seley as well as his right hand. She coordinates all the transactions between Red Talon's men and the Trade Center. Totach' and Seley share a unique relationship. She is the only Name-giver in the world Seley trusts with all his secrets, although they do not share a bed. The last K'tenshin overseer who hinted Seley and Totach' are more than business partners ended at the point of Totach's saber.

Totach' is a Sixth Circle Swordmaster. Despite her extraordinary height (or maybe because of it) she is considered a great beauty by t'skrang standards. She always dresses in fine silks and never leaves home without her whip and beautiful saber. Quick to anger and slow to forgive, she has fewer opportunities these days for brawls, but she still manages to get into a scrap from time to time. However, when doing business she is cold and to the point. Those working with her find her mind as sharp as her saber and quick as her whip.



## ASADAKEL LAMIA VALERA K'TENSHIN.

Male T'skrang Non-adept

"I, I, I, I gggguess I, I, I, I'll have ttttto chchchchcheck the bbbbooks."

DEX: 4 STR: 4 TOU: 4  
PER: 7 WIL: 4 CHA: 4

Initiative: 4/D6  
Number of Attacks: 1  
Attack: 4/D6  
Damage: By weapon  
Number of Spells: 0  
Spellcasting: NA  
Effect: NA

Physical Defense: 5  
Spell Defense: 9  
Social Defense: 6  
Physical Armor: 0  
Mystic Armor: 0  
Knockdown: 4/D6  
Recovery Tests: 2

Unc Rating: 21  
Death Rating: 30  
Wound Threshold: 7

Combat Move: 22  
Full Move: 44

### Racial Abilities

Tail Attack

### Skills

Accounting 7  
Mathematics 7  
Read/Write Language 1  
Speak Language 2

14/D20+D4  
14/ D20+D4  
8/2D6  
9/D8+D6

Legend Points: 16,800  
Equipment: None  
Loot: None

### Commentary

A member of the Lamia Niall, Asadake! has been accountant for the plantation since its foundation. Asadake! has never dreamed he would ever need to cheat his own house. Sadly, however, this small, shy, and heavily stuttering t'skrang fell beneath Seley's clutches. The Trade Master got him addicted to Crimson Ecstasy (see the drugs section above).

Totally dependent on Seley for a supply of the narcotic, Asadake! does whatever the Trade Master tells him. He has now committed so many felonies against his house that he sees no way of turning back. He fixes all the trading records, wiping each transaction clean of any dubious scam. He also manages the secret records for all the drug deals between Seley and Red Talon.

swim. I cursed myself a thousand times for risking myself on account of Eved, swearing that if made it back alive I would pound some sense into his thick skull.

Halfway to the other shore, there was a splash in the water and a loud outcry from the spectators behind me. The croc left his perch on the muddy bank and started swimming towards me.

Forgetting everything I thought I knew of silent swimming, I turned around and started paddling in the water as if my Gahad had taken me. I turned fourteen that year and was almost a grownup ork. I could arm-wrestle Yaerkiz Mazam the Beastmaster and he was a troll, but I had no delusions of my chances of outrunning the creature pursuing me. Using every drop of energy in my weary body I tried in vain to clear my mind of the image of the huge, crooked jaw. Something rough rubbed against my skin and I screamed. A splash, and then the huge croc rose from the water a couple yards in front of me. Its jaws held a six-foot wiggling fish. With another splash it dove below the surface and everything went still again.

I hardly remember my trip back to the shore. I was shaking like a man in fever beneath the searing noon-sun, and it took me several minutes before I could get back to my feet. I didn't hear the cheers or feel the slaps of my friends as they patted me on the back congratulating my success at not becoming the giant beast's meal. Totach' came over personally and slapped my back.

"You have balls, I'll give you that, ork," she said to me later in private. "Riding the crocs? What in bloody Dis were you thinking?"

"I wasn't, I acted on instinct."

"Good instincts boy, and good thinking. You saved us a lot of trouble today. If that damn inspector would have opened the duari crates..."

"I don't want to know."

"Smart kid, not to mention the coins you won me. I owe you big one."

"Then don't take it out on Eved. He's young, I'll explain things to him."

"I'm sorry, Seley has marked the kid for that insect of his."

"Then make Seley change his mind, and we're quits."

"Darn cheeky slave, you are one big thorn in the butt you know that, Crocboy? I'll see what I can do," she said.

I almost lost my life, but I won respect from my fellow slaves and the overseers. Totach' started calling

me Crocboy—and it stuck. At the age of fourteen I finally had a name of my own.

## GAME INFORMATION(For GM Eyes Only)

### Trade Center and Smuggling Operation

On the surface, Seley's Trade Center functions just like any of the numerous K'tenshin trading posts on the Servos. This Trade Center, however, has other more secretive and profitable operations. NesTech'al's Plantation is the biggest Barsaivian source for narcotic substances. Its "special" wares travel a well-developed smuggling network into Kratas for distribution all over Barsaive and beyond. The source of the substances is a mystery persona called Red Talon. He never shows his face in public and always works through proxies. Red Talon is the master, financier and brain behind a network (simply called the Red Talon network) of drug production. He employs a small army of collaborators, spies, smugglers and drug producers. One of the traders at NesTech'al's Plantation is actually a Red Talon man assigned to keep a close eye on Seley. He has several men in the plantation, also spying for him.

The substances are grown and harvested by several deep-jungle t'skrang tribes at unknown locations. The plants are taken to a secret lab somewhere in the northern Servos where they are processed into narcotic materials. Red Talon's agents then take the processed materials to Seley at NesTech'al's Plantation for shipment.

The Red Talon communicates with the Trade Master via a magical crystal (see Seley K'tenshin statistics below). The exchange of drug shipments is always made at night, usually at some ruins a couple miles north of the plantation. Totach' always supervises these dangerous affairs for Seley. Talon's agents always come hooded and masked despite the heat.

The illegal crates are stored under the Trade Center's warehouse. A trap door in one room leads to a short tunnel where the crates are kept until their pickup time. Two riverboats, the Haropakilea and the Shivoam's Tribute, coordinate shipments with Seley. Communication is made via spirit messengers, birds, and three nethermancers Seley hired as part of his network. All messages are coded so a caught spirit would reveal nothing except its destination. The crates are taken via the Tylon River into Kratas, and from there they are spread into all major cities of Barsaive and into Talea and Thera. Owning and dealing with most of these substances is prohibited under pain of death

## K'TENSHIN GUARDS

T'skrang Non-adepts

DEX: 6 STR: 5 TOU: 6  
PER: 4 WIL: 4 CHA: 4

Initiative: 6/D10  
Number of Attacks: 1  
Attack: By skill  
Damage: By weapon  
Number of Spells: 0  
Spellcasting: NA  
Effect: NA

Physical Defense: 7  
Spell Defense: 5  
Social Defense: 6  
Physical Armor: 3  
Mystic Armor: 0  
Knockdown: 5/D8  
Recovery Tests: 2

Unc Rating: 27  
Death Rating: 35  
Wound Threshold: 9

Combat Move: 30  
Full Move: 60

### Racial Abilities

Tail Attack

### Skills

Gunnery – Ballistae 1	5/D8
Gunnery – Fire Cannon 1	5/D8
Melee Weapons – Spears 6	12/2D10
Melee Weapons – Swords 6	12/2D10
Melee Weapons – Whips 6	12/2D10
Military Training 4	8/2D6
Read/Write Language 1	5/D8
Speak Language 2	6/D10

An additional 1–3 skills at rank 1–3 from the following list: cook, leather worker, blacksmith, carpenter, skinner, hunter, fisherman, engineer, weaver, gardener, surgeon, tailor (or any other valuable skill).

Legend Points: 16,800–19,600

Equipment: Leather Armor(3/0), Shortsword 9/D8+D6, Whip 8/2D6

Loot: None

### Commentary

Every K'tenshin plantation, including NesTech'al's, is a self-sufficient community. The plantation's isolation requires it to support all life necessities, so almost every member has several skills. K'tenshin guards double as cooks, leather workers, blacksmiths, carpenters, skimmers, hunters, fishermen, engineers, weavers, gardeners, and even surgeons.

K'tenshin plantations in general are very profitable, and NesTech'al's Plantation is one of the best. As the plantation members share the profits, a guard can earn as much as fifty times the money he could make anywhere else. The greater span of responsibility a man has on the plantation, the greater his share of the profits. Young K'tenshins stand in line to get into the plantation. For every guard who resigns after tasting the harsh life in the jungle, twenty jump on the vacant job. For bettering their chances those, applying for guard duty often learn several handy skills and hone their fighting abilities.

In the plantation, the guards learn basic fire cannon and ballistae gunnery skills. They also learn basic army drills. Captain Adimar K'tenshin is responsible for the guards' military education as well as for anything that concerns plantation security.



## ABANOS NIALl OVERSEERS

DEX: 6 STR: 5 TOU: 6  
PER: 4 WIL: 4 CHA: 4

Initiative: 6/D10  
Number of Attacks: 1  
Attack: By skill  
Damage: By weapon  
Number of Spells: 0  
Spellcasting: NA  
Effect: NA

Physical Defense: 7  
Spell Defense: 5  
Social Defense: 6  
Physical Armor: 3  
Mystic Armor: 0  
Knockdown: 5/D8  
Recovery Tests: 2

Unc Rating: 27  
Death Rating: 35  
Wound Threshold: 9

Combat Move: 30  
Full Move: 60

### Racial Abilities

Tail Attack

### Skills

Melee Weapons – Swords 6	12/2D10
Melee Weapons – Whips 6	12/2D10
Slavery Psychology 4	8/2D6
Slaves Control 4	8/2D6
Read/Write Language 1	5/D8
Speak Language 2	6/D10

An additional 1–2 skills at rank 1–2 from the following list: cook, leather worker, blacksmith, carpenter, skinner, hunter, fisherman, engineer, weaver, gardener, surgeon, or tailor (or any other valuable skill).

Legend Points: 11,600–12,200

Equipment: Leather Armor(3/0), Shortsword 9/D8+D6, Whip 8/2D6

Loot: None

### Commentary

The K'tenshin Abanos Niall's main trade is slavery, but not all of its members are traders. Slavery needs overseers to control slaves and while all the other Nialls have their own overseers, no one treats this hard (and often cruel) occupation as seriously as the Abanos t'skrang. Their skills are sought after wherever there's a big percentage of slaves compared to free men. In NesTech'al's plantation, all the slave overseers come from the Abanos Niall.

Outsiders may consider the occupation cruel, but the Abanos Niall teaches its members a practical view on slavery. Slaves are property like any other property, and they are expensive. The overseer's job is to extract the maximum use from that property to make it worth its cost. Damaging the property or, Dis forbid, killing it, is to be avoided.

All Abanos Niall overseers have been brought up with this view and have firm ideas about slavery, its necessity, and the best ways to manage it. Overseeing is a skill, and like any other skill it demands attention, lots of psychology, and occasional cruelty.

Like the guards, most slave overseers have secondary skills.

in all the large cities, but the lure of easy money is so great the threat is not a deterrent. Seley lowers the risk by keeping a very strict hierarchy. The network is organized into small cells where a man knows only those working inside his cell and the man above him. Few threads lead to Seley himself and almost none lead to Red Talon.

## Illegal Substances

Red Talon deals with several illegal substances, and a few are detailed here. The GM should feel free to add to this list.

**Name:** Bulrah Se

**Street Name:** Blue Aphrodisiac

**Cost:** 25sp/dose

**Description:** The Bulrah Se is a fern that grows deep in the Servos. It is dried, heated and crushed into blue powder. The drug is usually mixed with an alcoholic drink, and takes affect after three minutes. It sharpens physical experience by as much as ten times, awakens sexuality in both males and females, and lowers resolve. Bulrah Se is very popular at Theran parties.

**Effect:** Name-givers under the influence have their social defense lowered by 5 during the drug's duration. All perception tests that involve the sense of touch receive a +2 Step bonus. The user's pain threshold also lowers considerably, and a Wound causes a Penalty of 3 steps to all Actions. For obvious reasons Bulrah Se doesn't affect obsidimen.

**Duration:** 3 hours

**Addictiveness:** Bulrah Se is not physically or mentally addictive but constant use can cause physiological side effects. Heavy users sometimes find themselves unable to perform in bed without it.

**Name:** Ap'et

**Street Name:** Crimson Ecstasy or Lollypop

**Cost:** 20sp/dose

**Description:** Ap'et is produced from a red weed found growing in swampy areas. A very long process of heating it up and adding several substances creates what is called Crimson Ecstasy, or Lollypop in street lingo. The drug is taken by putting the lollypop under the tongue. The drug induces a surge of great physical pleasure that lasts for almost an hour. Reports from people under the influence tell of a red veil that rises in front of the users' eyes, making them see the world in various shades of deep red, hence the name.

**Effect:** Name-givers under the influence perform all

actions with a penalty of -5 steps.

**Duration:** 30 + D20 minutes

**Addictiveness:** Very! After taking At'et three times each time it is consumed again, a Willpower Test must be made against Difficulty Number 10. Failure means the user is addicted. An addict must consume one dose/day or suffer a -2 step penalty to all actions until a dose is taken or until he kicks the habit. Kicking the habit requires at least 2 days without consumption. Each day a Willpower Test is performed against Difficulty Number 7. In order to kick the habit, the addict needs 2 successes. Each failure lengthens the process by an additional day.

**Name:** Tualay

**Street Name:** Wizard's Friend

**Cost:** 140sp/dose

**Description:** Tualay is produced from a small mushroom found growing on the shores of the Servos. A lengthy process involving blood magic produces a fine white powder for inhalation. Wizard's Friend clears the mind and heightens the senses. It greatly enhances the speed of the mind and magical processes.

**Effect:** Name-givers under the influence perform all Perception-Based Tests at 2 steps higher. It also shortens the time it takes to weave a thread by half to a minimum of one Round (thus it takes 1 Round to weave the 2 Threads but the weaving difficulty remains the same for a single Thread).

**Duration:** 10 + d10 minutes

**Addictiveness:** Very! Each consumption of Tualay beyond the first may cause addiction. For checking addiction, a Willpower Test must be made against Difficulty Number 15. Failure means the user is addicted. An addict must consume one dose/day or perform Perception-Based Tests with -2 step penalty. Kicking the habit requires at least 4 days without consumption. Each day a Willpower Test is performed against Difficulty Number 15. To kick the habit, the addict needs four successes. Each failure lengthens the process by an additional day.

**Name:** Orach

**Street Name:** Dust of Dreams

**Cost:** 15sp/dose

**Description:** Orach is produced from a white orchid growing in a mountainous jungle location. After being magically heated with True fire, it turns into powder. The powder is then boiled in water, and the fumes inhaled. The fumes produce a dream-like state lasting

hours. This drug is illegal in Throal. In Thera it is legal and very popular. Many high society parties offer it as part of the entertainment.

**Effect:** Name-givers under the influence perform all actions with a penalty of -6 steps; perception tests are made at -8 steps.

**Duration:** hours

**Addictiveness:** Very! After taking the dust three times, each time it is consumed again, a Willpower Test must be made against Difficulty Number 10. Failure means the user is addicted. An addict must consume one dose/day or suffer a penalty of -2 steps to all actions until another dose is taken or until he kicks the habit. Kicking the habit requires at least 2 days without consumption. Each day a Willpower Test is performed against Difficulty Number 7. To kick the habit, the addict needs 2 successes. Each failure lengthens the process by an additional day.

### Adventure Seeds—Bringing Down the Network

Illegal substances could spark a simple adventure where the player characters are asked to capture a single shipment. They might follow it down the Servos and track it to Kratas. Or a whole campaign could be based around the attempts to bring down the entire smuggling network (from Kratas to the plantation and maybe Red Talon himself). Interests in Throal, Thera, or Iopos might see the network as a threat and could trigger this sort of campaign. If the characters need an extra motivation, a GM could always hook someone the PCs care about on one of the drugs.

### THREAD ITEM DESCRIPTIONS

#### T'eleck's Saber

T'eleck is a famous V'strimon Swordmaster who died during the first Theran war. The saber was beautifully crafted by an unknown obsidiman Weaponsmith. It has T'eleck's name inscribed on it with invisible magical runes. When T'eleck's name is uttered out loud the runes glow with silvery light.

Spell Defense: 15

Maximum Rank: 4

Maximum Threads: 2

Weight: 3

Cost: 2000

#### Rank 1

Cost: 200



The player must learn the original name of the owner.  
The saber is now Damage step 8.

### **Rank 2**

Cost: 300

The saber adds +1 step to Attack Test. The saber is now Damage step 9.

### **Rank 3**

Cost: 500

The saber adds +1 step to Attack Test. The saber is now Damage step 10.

### **Rank 4**

Cost: 900

T'eleck has made his last stand while he was on the Syrtis Pilgrimage Rout. The player must complete the Pilgrimage Rout and ask T'eleck's unasked question when he reaches the Shivalahala (The question is up to the GM).

The saber adds +3 steps to Attack Test. The saber is now Damage step 11

### **T'eleck's Gauntlets**

These gauntlets, instead of adding to the wearer's protection, increase the damage he inflicts in combat, whether melee or ranged.

Spell Defense: 13

Maximum Rank: 3

Maximum Threads: 2

Weight: 2

Cost: 2000

### **Rank 2**

Effect: +2 steps to wearer's Damage Tests  
Totach' has woven two Ranks to this item.

### **Crystal Lamp Of Nivar Merek**

Spell Defense: 11

Maximum Rank: 2

Maximum Threads: 2

Weight: 2

Cost: 500

Nivar created more than a hundred sets of double crystal lamps, made for long distance communication. A lamp can only communicate with its identical pair.

### **Rank 1**

Cost: 100

Allows the user to receive messages via the lamp. The lamp glows whenever a message awaits. The user then takes the lamp and flips it above a piece of paper. Ink pours from the lamp and writes the message sent from the other end.

Cost to receive a message:

1 Strain to receive a message over 10 miles or less

2 Strain to receive a message over 100 miles or less

4 Strain to receive a message 1000 miles or less

Messages cannot be sent or received over distances greater than 1000 miles.

### **Rank 2**

Cost: 200

Allows the user to send messages via the lamp. The user writes a message on a piece of paper (no more than 50 words ) with fresh ink and burns it inside the lamp.

Cost to send a message:

1 Strain to send a message over 10 miles or less

2 Strain to send a message over 100 miles or less

4 Strain to send a message 1000 miles or less

Messages cannot be sent or received over distances greater than 1000 miles.

Seley has woven two Ranks to the lamp and uses this instrument to send and receive messages from Red Talon.

### **K'tenshin Guards and Abanos Niall Overseers**

The plantation was designed to accommodate three task forces: one for taking care of the fields, a smaller task force for running the docks, and a crew to handle the jungle compound. After the y'aikara and their trade potential was discovered, two additional task forces were created: the lumberjacks team, responsible for felling the majestic trees, and the ropes team under Seley K'tenshin for hauling them to the docks. The fields task force contains 30 slaves, the dock team 8, another 7 work the rafts construction team, the lumberjacks team contains 30 slaves, and the ropes team contains almost 50 slaves. Besides the regular task force, another 25 slaves do odd jobs at the docks and the plantation. The total slave population is around 150.

As a rule, the plantation has at least one K'tenshin for every two slaves. Every five slaves have one guard and every ten slaves have an overseer.

TO BE CONTINUED...

## SELEY LAMIA K'TENEIR K'TENSHIN

39 y.o. Male T'skrang Boatman, Seventh Circle

"I'm sorry sweetheart, but do you see bitch written on my forehead? No? Then why are you trying to..."

DEX: 4 STR: 6 TOU: 5  
PER: 6 WIL: 6 CHA: 5

Initiative: 3/D4  
Number of Attacks: 1  
Attack: By talent  
Damage: By weapon  
Number of Spells: 0  
Spellcasting: NA  
Effect: NA

Unc Rating: 52  
Death Rating: 67  
Wound Threshold: 8

Karma Points: 5

### Racial Abilities

Tail Attack

### Discipline Abilities

Boatman 4: May spend Karma on Dexterity only.  
Boatman 6: May spend Karma to increase damage of any Melee Attack.

### Talents

Acrobatic Strike 6	10/D10+D6
Avoid Blow 6	10/D10+D6
Cast Net 7	11/D10+D8
Durability (6/5) 6	-
Engaging Banter 7	12/2D10
Evaluate 7	13/D12+D10
First Impression 1	6/D10
Great Leap 1	5/D8
Haggle 7	12/2D10
Karma Ritual 6	-
Lizard Leap 2	8/2D6
Melee Weapons 7	11/D10+D8
Mystic Aim 7	13/D12+D10
Pilot Boat 8	14/D20+D4
Read River 7	13/D12+D10
Speak Language 7	13/D12+D10
Thread Weaving - Net 5	11/D10+D8
Throwing Weapons 7	11/D10+D8
Unarmed Combat 6	10/D10+D6

### Skills

Bribery 5	10/D10+D6
Etiquette 5	10/D10+D6
Fast Hand 5	11/D10+D8
Forgery 5	9/D8+D6
Gambling 3	9/D8+D6
Map Making 1	6/D10
Read/Write Language 1	7/D12
Speak Language 2	8/2D6
Trading - Equipment 1	6/D10
Underworld Rumors 3	9/D8+D6

Physical Defense: 11  
Spell Defense : 8  
Social Defense : 6  
Physical Armor: 0  
Mystic Armor: 2  
Knockdown: 4/D6  
Recovery Tests: 2

Combat Move: 10  
Full Move: 20

Karma Step: 4/D6

Legend Points: 97,300

Equipment: Dagger 8/2D6, Quarterstaff 8/2D6

Loot: None

### Commentary

Formerly a successful K'tenshin war fleet officer, Seley still insists people call him captain even though he never achieved the rank. As first officer he ran a successful protection scam, demanding tributes from captains going up the Servos. His game ended one day when one of the traders refused to pay. Seley chased the trader and trashed his battleship over a hidden snag. The K'tenshin Shivalahala was so furious she wanted him banished. His Niall's pressure, however, lessened the penalty, and he was allowed to remain a K'tenshin but forever banned from serving on a riverboat.

He became part of a small smuggling network near Travar moving illegal contraband up and down the Servos to Kratas. In one year he became head of the operation, after the former leader "retired" under suspicious circumstances. At this time, Red Talon's agents first contacted him. They told him to apply for a new job as a Trade Master at NesTech'al's Plantation, as this unique position would allow him to start a profitable relationship with Red Talon. Seley applied for the very sought after position and miraculously all the other applicants withdrew.

Seley rules the Trade Center with the iron fist of a true dictator. Master of manipulation and fear, paranoid to the core, the keyword of all his actions is leverage. Seley holds nothing dear, has no friends, and keeps those working for him on a tight leash. His methods vary from bribery, to intimidation, to blackmail—and when other options fail—murder. His favorite method is addicting a person to a drug and then controlling the person through the addiction.

Seley uses his former Travarian network to move the drugs between the Servos and Kratas. Few men who operate the network know his true identity as he has taken to Red Talon's method of working through proxies.

A very short, yellowish t'skrang, Seley uses a walking stick. The battleship accident scarred him more than just physically. He is bitter, hateful, and blames the world for all his misfortunes. He has no remorse if city kid dies from the drugs he spreads. All he thinks about is the profits. His dealing with Red Talon has made him a very rich t'skrang. Seley plans on running the business for at least ten more years before retiring.

Seley fears only two people: Red Talon and NesTech'al. He treats his mysterious business partner with utmost respect. Seley keeps a straight record with the drug lord, knowing to cheat Red Talon is to sign your death warrant.

Seley treats NesTech'al, the plantation master, with careful courtesy. He once asked Red Talon for help in eliminating NesTech'al and was warned the plantation master was off limits. Seley is sure that NesTech'al has at least partial knowledge of the illegal operations in the Trade Center and is also aware the plantation master could close his entire operation if he had the whim. This knowledge keeps Seley awake at nights and he maintains a close watch on every move NesTech'al makes. Seley is also trying to buy more men, as the plantation is split into two camps, those loyal to Seley and those loyal to the plantation master. Though his camp is currently bigger, Seley still dreads the day when an open confrontation erupts.



## EARTHDAWN PUBLISHING TRUST WRITER'S SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Thank you for your interest in writing for the Earthdawn Publishing Trust (EDPT). Please use the following guidelines for submitting material to the EDPT fanzine, Book of Tomorrow. Please follow these Submission Guidelines as closely as possible.

### General Submission Procedure

The majority of EDPT's projects actually come from freelance proposals. EDPT accepts all submission for review. We cannot guarantee that your submission will appear in the Book of Tomorrow fanzine, but we welcome any chance to spread Earthdawn material to fans. If you are unsure about the process, please e-mail the editor. He or she will send you a message informing you of any deadlines to meet a particular Book of Tomorrow volume, as well as information on what EDPT will be looking at, for that particular issue. Please do not send incomplete articles. We log all proposals into a database and send you an e-mail acknowledging that we received your proposal. The proposal is given to the specific content reader to review.

### The Submission

An article for the fanzine Book of Tomorrow should run in length up to 20 pages and contain four parts:

1. **Title.** Be sure your title is clearly identified. Placing the title at the top of the submission is usually sufficient so that our editor can identify your submission.
2. **A Short Description.** A single sentence that describes what your article is about should be included. This will be used to describe your article in the table of contents.
3. **Earthdawn Version.** Include which version of Earthdawn your article is being written for, it will help our editor determine if any statistics follow the prescribed format of published products. The versions are; Earthdawn 1st edition (FASA), Earthdawn 2nd edition (LRG), Earthdawn Classic (RBL).
4. **Submission.** Obviously, we need the actual submission in order to put it in the Book of Tomorrow.

### Project Types

Some project/article topics accepted by the Book of Tomorrow include, but are not limited to:

#### Adventures

Adventure submissions should be around 10 pages in length and follow standard Earthdawn format. This includes a synopsis of the adventure as well as an aftermath of what happens.

#### Short Story/Legends

Short stories should be around 3-5 pages in length. Legends

can be as short as a single page. The length of a short story/legend is not a rule for acceptance in the Book of Tomorrow, but we would like to be able to fill the fanzine with multiple articles without the length being an editing nightmare. If your article contains additional Earthdawn material (i.e. thread item or creature descriptions) your article will almost always be longer, and this is acceptable.

### Thread Items

Single thread item submissions may be grouped together with other thread items into a common article. If the thread item is accompanied by a short story or legend, it may be placed as separate article depending on its length.

### Creatures

Single creature submissions may be grouped together with other creatures into a common article. If creature is accompanied by a short story or legend, it may be placed as separate article depending on its length.

### Personalities

Character personalities should include a history of the character as well as stats. Depending of the length of the article, it may be included with other personalities.

### Locations

Locations should be at least 2 pages in length, detailing the history of the location and major personalities. Please include any maps of the location that you may have even if they are just sketches. Also, plot hooks should be included so that the readers may better use the article in their games.

### Electronic Mail Submissions

All submissions should be submitted in 12 pt Arial font, Plain or Rich Text format. EDPT can accept most electronic formats including MS Word, Wordperfect, and Open Office.

Please do not format your story. Formatting must be done in the layout phase of the Book of Tomorrow and any preexisting formatting must be stripped [by the layout person] in order to do this.

Please use the EDPT referencing list 'Earthdawn Abbreviations' (located at the end of this fanzine). This helps conserve space and allows the editors to quickly be able to look up what you have referenced. An example: if you are referring to Redbrick's Earthdawn Player's Compendium page 234, it is abbreviated as 'EPC 234.'

EDPT can be reached at the following addresses:

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Adopted on October 29, 1999

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## Earthdawn Abbreviations

EDPT uses the following abbreviations for second and subsequent references to Earthdawn products.

**ED** Earthdawn

**ED2** Earthdawn 2nd Edition

**EPC** Earthdawn Players Compendium

**EGC** Earthdawn Gamasters Compendium

**EDC** Earthdawn Companion

**EDC2** Earthdawn Companion 2nd Edition

**EGM** Earthdawn Gamemaster Pack

**D1** Denizens of Earthdawn, Vol. I

**D2** Denizens of Earthdawn, Vol. II

**RC** Earthdawn Races Compendium

**LE** Legends of Earthdawn

**CoB** Creatures of Barsaive

**AW** The Adept's Way

**HOR** Horrors

**SR** Serpent River

**BE** Book of Exploration

**TDK** Throal: The Dwarf Kingdom

**ESG** Earthdawn Survival Guide

**BW** Blood Wood

**TE** Theran Empire

**SS** Secret Societies of Barsaive

**CR** Crystal Raiders of Barsaive

**CF** The Ork Nation of Cara Fahd

**DRG** Dragons

**MMS** Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets

**AM** Arcane Mysteries of Barsaive

**MoB** Mists of Betrayal

**TiS** Terror in the Skies

**Inf** Infected

**Pad** Parlainth Adventures

**SP** Shattered Pattern

**Sky** Sky Point Adventures

**Bla** Blades

**Tad** Throal Adventures

**PtW** Prelude to War

**PoD** Path of Deception

**BaW** Barsaive at War

**BiC** Barsaive in Chaos

**AR** Ardanyan's Revenge

**Bx** Barsaive Box

**BxP** Explorer's Guide to Barsaive

**BxG** Barsaive Gamemaster's Book

**Px** Parlainth Box

**PxG** Parlainth Gamemaster's Guide (first part of the book)

**PxR** Ruins of Parlainth (second part of the book)

**Vx** Sky Point & Vivane Box

**VxB** Barsaivian Vivane

**VxT** Theran Vivane

**VxV** Vivane Province

**BoT** Book of Tomorrow

**CX** Codex Arcanus

**Bjs** B'Jados

**EDJ** Earthdawn Journal